STORIES FROM GREAT OPERAS

J. WALKER McSPADDEN

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The giants bore Freia away

Stories From Great Operas

By
J. WALKER McSPADDEN
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"Shakesperian Synopses," etc.

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PREFACE

From many lands have they come—these tales of romance and daring which some of the greatest musical geniuses of the world have enshrined in deathless song. We can close our eyes and see the familiar figures now as they stalk across the stage: Rhadames at the head of his triumphant cohorts; Faust arm in arm with a cavalier dressed all in red; the gipsy girl of Seville luring men to death by her coquetry; Lohengrin sailing majestically down the river in his swan-boat; and many another. We can hear the crash of cymbals, the blare of trumpets, and the sweet, insistent tones of the violin, which greet each entrant.

Then the trappings of the opera-house fade away; the music becomes but a memory; and we follow these heroes and heroines of music out into the world of men and women. Here, "the story's the thing," and a right royal story it is.

Let us retell some of these tales, for the benefit of the many readers who like a goodly story

whether grave or gay; for those who may never hear the music which is wedded to the legend (though God forbid!) yet wish to know its meaning none the less; and for the music-lovers who may find here, before the curtain rises, just the knowledge they seek for the opera's sake.

Here, then, is a sheaf of these immortal stories—set forth only as stories, with free interplay of imagination, so that the reader may forget the mere mechanics of the stage for the nonce, and follow far afield in the pleasant realms of romance.

J. W. M.

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*These four operas are linked together into one narrative, under the title of "The Nibelungen Ring," which we have called "The Ring of the Curse."

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Stories From Great Operas

AIDA

I

CENTURIES ago, during the time of the Pharaohs of Egypt, a war was being waged against Ethiopia. It was by no means the first war, for the hosts of Pharaoh marched far and wide subduing many lands and peoples. But Ethiopia had stubbornly resisted, and had even presumed to send her own hosts against Egypt.

The Ethiopian King, Amonasro, had a personal motive in thus daring to attack his powerful neighbor to the north. In an earlier campaign, his own daughter had been carried off, and was even then a slave in some Egyptian palace. So he summoned all his cohorts together, and announced that he would lead the invasion in person.

In the Egyptian city of Memphis all was excitement at news of this invasion. Here was the court of the king, and here the stately temples

to Isis and Osiris, their favorite gods. On the day when our story opens, a sacred festival was being held, and libations were poured to Isis, who was to announce through her priests the name of the general to head the Egyptian army against the enemy.

One of the bravest and most dashing of the officers was Rhadames, who had sought out the High Priest, Ramfis, in the hope that he himself might be appointed to this high post. He stated his desires very frankly to the priest.

"However, I know that there are many other officers in the army just as worthy," he ended. "And I am glad to serve my country either at the head of her legions, or as a private in the humblest capacity."

The High Priest smiled approvingly. He knew that Isis had already spoken, but he was not yet ready to announce her decision.

After he departed Rhadames lingered thinking over the situation. Was it entirely love of country that made him so eager for service? No, he must be honest with himself. He was urged forward by his great love for Aida, a slave girl in Pharaoh's court. He had loved her from the moment he first beheld her, a few short months before, and from the glances which she had given him, he believed he was loved in return. The heart does not need words of the

tongue to deliver its messages. Now as he thought of the "heavenly Aida" and her charms, he felt that he would be the happiest man in the world if a victory in battle would give him the right to ask her hand of Pharaoh.

As he thus indulged in pleasing day dreams, who should enter but Aida herself. But she was not alone. Her royal mistress, the Princess Amneris, Pharaoh's daughter, was with her. Now Amneris herself loved Rhadames, and had not tried to conceal her feelings. Being a royal princess, she was privileged to choose the man of her heart. And so Rhadames had perceived this growing tenderness on the part of Amneris, with ill-concealed discomfort.

As for Amneris, she had become impatient over his lack of response, but had not guessed the true reason until to-day. Seeing his face light up as they approached, she said:

"Ah, Rhadames! What makes you so happy to-day?"

"I am only hoping, Princess," he answered truthfully, "that I may be favored with the generalship of the army."

"What, would you take up arms again so soon?" she asked. "You have been much in the field of late."

"I fear I am better suited for it than for the soft life of court," he replied bluntly. "And be-

sides, if the gods should grant victory to my arms, I might be emboldened to seek a boon of the mighty Pharaoh."

"He could scarce deny thee anything—even one of his own household," said the Princess casting an arch glance in his direction.

But what was her amazement and sudden anger to see him looking—not at her—but at the gentle slave girl who stood by her side. Never had he looked at her, the mistress, with such a tender glance! She saw too, that Aida after darting one look at him lowered her eyes again, which were filled with tears.

"Ha! sits the wind in this direction?" thought Amneris. But outwardly she dissembled. She called the girl to her and asked her why she wept.

"It is because of these constant wars," confessed the girl. "Why cannot nations dwell side by side with amity?"

But secretly she wept because the other warring land was Ethiopia—her own father's dominion. For she was a royal princess there, although a slave here. And now her lover was eager to take up arms against her own father!

Still Amneris talked to her and Rhadames in a purring voice, much as a cat would talk to a mouse, and all the time watching these two narrowly beneath her half-closed lids. The of-

ficer was ill at ease. He was too honest to be able to conceal his feelings, or to accept the Princess's love; and he feared lest she should visit her wrath upon this gentle girl.

A blare of trumpets put an end to the painful situation. It announced the coming of the King; and presently in he marched, preceded by soldiers, priests, pages, and others of his court. It made a brilliant scene.

"We have heard news of grave import," announced the monarch. "A messenger has just arrived to say that already the Ethiopian hordes have crossed our southern border. They are led by King Amonasro himself."

"Amonasro!" cried Aida, faintly, but her voice was drowned in the general tumult which followed the King's announcement. It was her father! And now if he should meet Rhadames—her heart felt sick with its conflicting emotions.

"Hear ye!" commanded Pharaoh, motioning for silence. "It is our will that the Egyptian army set forth to meet the invader to-morrow at break of day. As for your leader, the goddess Isis has spoken."

He paused a moment, and in the intense silence lifted his golden sceptre and pointed.

"There he stands!"

And he indicated Rhadames.

A great shout went up, for Rhadames was popular, and all felt confidence in him. Surely, they felt, if anyone could check the fierce Amonasro, it was he.

Rhadames gracefully bowed to his king and to the cheering court.

"Now may the gracious goddess follow us to victory," he said.

The King smiled his approval. Here was no idle boasting.

"Let us first repair to the temple of Ptah, and there consecrate our banners," he commanded.

The proud Amneris stepped forward to congratulate the new general. "Thou must take the war standards from my hand," she said in a low voice. "And remember, if thou dost return with victory, thou canst ask my royal father for what thou wilt."

And she looked at him languishingly.

Rhadames thanked her courteously, but again cast a fleeting glance at the slave girl. Aida had clasped her hands, and her eyes were lifted to heaven in prayer. She was praying for the safety of both her father and her lover.

II

The confidence of the people of Egypt in their new leader was not misplaced. After

some days of weary waiting, swift runners returned from the battle front to say that the hosts of Ethiopia had been utterly defeated by Rhadames and his army, and that he was already on his way back with many captives at his chariot wheels.

Great was the rejoicing at this news. The people gave themselves over to revelry and feasting.

Within the royal palace the Princess Amneris sat a prey to conflicting emotions. Her hero had won a great victory, and a word from her to her father would make him her's. Yet she was disturbed by his seeming attachment for Aida. Well, she would find out for herself just how the land lay, in that direction.

As she half reclined on her divan, a picture of graceful indolence, her slaves ran hither and thither to do her bidding. Two waved huge ostrich feather and peacock fans above her head. Another knelt at her feet with a jar of rich perfume. Some played instruments, others sang, while still others danced. Two huge black slaves stood guard at the door. It was a picture of Oriental luxury, and yet the petted object of their attention was displeased. A frown gathered upon her brow and she clapped her hands.

"Begone! I would be alone!" she com-

manded. Then as all were leaving the room she beckoned Aida to remain.

The girl lingered and looked at her mistress timidly. There was no foreseeing this imperious creature's moods, and she had the power of life and death over her slaves.

"Come, sit by my side," she said in oily tones. "I am sorry for thee, Aida!"

"Why?" murmured the girl.

"Thy countrymen are again conquered and many are made prisoners. We will see them, one day soon, in the triumphal procession. But, like thee, I cannot take any joy in this spectacle."

"Why?" asked Aida again.

"He who should be leading our victorious hosts—does not return!"

Her voice trembled slightly at these words, and she pretended to wipe away a tear.

Aida's heart gave a great throb. "You do not mean—Rhadames!" she faltered.

"Yes!" said Amneris bowing her head.

Aida gave a little cry which instantly betrayed her heart's secret, and began to weep.

"So thou dost love him!" exclaimed the Princess triumphantly. "Foolish slave! He has not fallen in battle, but he will not return—to thee! How dost thou dare to think of one so far above thee—or to aspire to be *my* rival!"

Fiercely the angry Princess upbraided her, and ended by threatening to make an example of her, which would be long remembered.

Aida made no further attempt to conceal her feelings, nor did she cringe or sue for mercy. She only replied with quiet dignity:

"Princess, that I love the great Rhadames is my misfortune. But as for making me suffer—do not I suffer already in knowing that he has overcome my kinsmen, and that even now my father may be marching in fetters behind his chariot?"

"Thou wilt wish that both he and thee were slain in battle!" said the Princess darkly.

What other threats her jealous rage would have prompted were cut short by the sound of trumpets. Then came a messenger from Pharaoh to summon her to witness the triumphal entry. Aida would have lingered behind, but with a scornful smile Amneris bade her attend.

At the gates of the city they found thousands of citizens assembled, all on tiptoe with eagerness to greet the victors. The King had caused a raised dais to be erected, and as the palanquin of the Princess was borne in on the shoulders of slaves, he motioned that she should mount the throne beside him.

Scarcely had she taken her position when the first fanfare of trumpets proclaimed the

marching hosts. The gates were opened wide and in they came—cavalry and troopers, chariots and spearmen, trumpeters and standard-bearers, their arms laden with glittering spoils which they piled high before the throne.

The great throng greeted each section with mighty huzzas, but their cheers were as nothing to the applause which presently burst forth.

The mighty Rhadames himself appeared driving his own war chariot to which were harnessed four milk-white Arabian horses. In advance of his chariot went dancing girls scattering flowers. Behind the chariot came a throng of prisoners headed by Amonasro himself.

Aida gave a little cry and pressed her hand to her breast, when she beheld her father thus humiliated. But if he saw or heard her he gave no sign. He walked with head erect meeting the glances of his captors with fierce scorn.

Now the chariot had drawn up with a flourish before the throne of Pharaoh, and Rhadames, tossing his reins to an attendant, leaped out and knelt before his King.

"Arise, Rhadames, and come hither!" commanded Pharaoh.

The general mounted the steps, and again paused before the royal pair. Then Amneris herself placed the laurel wreath upon his brow, while the multitude shouted again.

"Thou hast performed valiant service for the state," announced Pharaoh, "and we are well pleased with thee. Ask what thou wilt, by way of recompense. We have no will to deny thee."

And he half glanced at his daughter, who in sooth looked very lovely as she stood there smiling and blushing.

Rhadames hesitated but a moment. His quick eye had caught sight of Aida, looking the picture of dejection. He remembered that these prisoners were her people.

"Sire," he said, raising his eyes and looking at Pharaoh, "if I may indeed have a boon for doing what, after all, was only my duty, I would ask of thee the lives of these captives."

A murmur of surprise arose from the crowd, and most of all from the priests, who had been clamoring for their death. But the King raised his hand for silence.

"Thy wish shall be granted," he said; "but the leader—this Ethiopian king, Amonasro, must be kept captive for the safety of my realm."

With this promise Rhadames was fain to be content. He bowed his head in assent.

"One other boon thou dids't not ask," continued Pharaoh, "and that will I grant unasked. I bestow upon thee the hand of my daughter,

Amneris, and proclaim that thou art heir to the throne of all Egypt!"

Again the throng shouted its approval, as they looked at the handsome pair who seemed to outward glance so well matched. But what they could not see was the stab of pain that went through Rhadames's heart as he took the Princess's hand; nor yet the deathlike pallor which seized poor Aida as she beheld her father in captivity, and the hand of her lover bestowed upon another.

III

On the night before her marriage, the Princess went to the Temple of Isis to make her vows. It was the preliminary rite of the wedding ceremony, and she went in state with the High Priest followed by her attendants.

In the rear came Aida, but her thoughts were not upon this ceremony. She had come in the hope of meeting for the last time the man whom she must give up. But as she lingered in the shadow of the temple columns, the man who presently approached was, not Rhadames, but Amonasro.

"Father—you?" she exclaimed in a whisper.

"'Tis I," he responded, placing his arms tenderly about her.

"What do you here?" she questioned anxiously, looking about her.

"We are safe for a time. They are all within the temple," he reassured her. "My child, I offer you a chance to serve your country—and win your own happiness."

"How?" she queried.

"The army of Ethiopia is not yet overcome. Only one wing of it was shattered in the recent victory. All that we need now to know is the route which the enemy will take, when next he marches against us."

"But how can I discover that?"

"One man knows that, and he is your lover. He will not refuse you anything. Nay, he would fly with you."

"No, father," she replied. "I love him too much to ask him to betray his people."

"And will you stand calmly aside and behold him wedded to another?"

"Father! tempt me not! but—hasten away —Rhadames is approaching."

He crept behind the shelter of a pillar just as the general appeared, looking on every side for Aida.

"Ah, my beloved one!" he greeted her. "I am glad to have found you here to-night, for to-morrow I must away again."

"Whither?" she asked.

"The Ethiopians have risen again, and I must march at once."

"But how about—the royal wedding?" she asked bitterly.

"The royal wedding can wait—forever, if my own wishes were consulted. But listen, beloved! I am marching again to meet the enemy. If I am victorious the second time, I shall ask another boon of Pharaoh. I shall ask that he name another heir to his throne, another spouse for his daughter, and give me instead the hand of Aida!"

"Foolish man!" she said, but flushed happily nevertheless. "Know you not that the King cannot unsay the words he has publicly said? No, I have a better plan. Fly with me this very night!"

"What! Become a traitor to my country?"

"You need not take up arms against your country. But fly with me to Ethiopia, and we can seek shelter there."

The temptation was great, and Rhadames stood silent, in troubled thought. To the south lay freedom and the woman of his choice. To the north, a gilded slavery.

"Tell me—could we not find a safe path toward the south?" she asked.

"Yes, that would be easy," he admitted.

"My army marches by the Pass of Napata, and we could easily go some other route."

"'Tis well!" said an unexpected voice, as Amonasro stepped boldly into the open. "Do thou take my daughter by some safe route, while I post my soldiers to guard the Pass of Napata."

"Thou, Amonasro?" cried Rhadames, starting back, "and this thy daughter?"

"Aida is Princess of Ethiopia, and of blood as royal as the proud Amneris," rejoined the other. "Come—cast thy lot with us, even passively, and the highest honors Ethiopia can bestow will be thine."

Still Rhadames hesitated, though sorely tempted. He need not lift a finger against Egypt, he told himself, and yet this radiant girl by his side would be his. Then he shook his head slowly.

"I cannot do this thing," he said.

"Ah, fly with us, beloved!" pleaded Aida, laying her hand upon his arm.

A shrill scream broke in upon their parley.

"The traitors! Seize them!" came the cry, as Amneris herself rushed from the temple. She had heard just enough to excite her suspicion; but the sight alone of Aida and Rhadames together was enough to excite her to fury.

Alarmed by her outcries the guards came

rushing up. They hesitated when they saw the general, and in that moment Rhadames with a quick nod of his head bade the Ethiopian king and his daughter seek safety in flight. He himself drew his sword and stood on guard.

"After them!" screamed the Princess, but Rhadames blocked the way.

Then the calm voice of Ramfis, the High Priest, was heard:

"Rhadames, you are my prisoner," he said. "Yield up your sword!"

IV

Rhadames was cast into a dungeon, there to await his trial before the priesthood. None could foretell what the verdict would be, and popular opinion was strongly divided. All sorts of rumors were afloat—some that he had sold the Egyptian army, and others that he was planning a coup against the Ethiopians. Only the Princess Amneris knew the exact truth, and she planned to use it to her own advantage.

Just before the time appointed for the trial she privately visited his cell. At a word from her the guards respectfully withdrew and they were alone together.

"Rhadames, I still love you," she began in a pleading voice. "See, I humble myself to confess it. And I alone can save you. Admit pub-

licly that you do not love Aida, and I will obtain your pardon from the King."

"But I cannot admit a lie," he answered sadly. "I did not knowingly betray my country, but I do love Aida."

"She is forever beyond your reach," said Amneris, still repressing her feelings.

"She is not dead?" he asked quickly.

"No—her father was slain, but she herself escaped."

"Then may the gods protect her! As for me, I am ready to submit myself to my fate."

"Then die, wretched man!" cried the furious Princess. "If you persist in this foolish infatuation, when you might have had a throne, I have no more to say!"

And she swept haughtily from the dungeon.

But once her anger had cooled, she was again desirous of saving this man whom she loved. She dared not present herself in the Hall of Judgment, whither the prisoner was presently taken, but she stood just outside the door and listened to the droning voice of the court crier:

"Rhadames, Rhadames, Rhadames!" he chanted. "Appear before this tribunal and answer to the charge of high treason against the State!"

There was silence for a moment, and then the Princess shuddered as she heard the list of formal

charges. She realized that now there was no hope. The priests resented it because Rhadames had obtained the lives of his prisoners, and now they charged that even when he made his request he was plotting treason.

The trial, which was a mockery of justice, was soon over, and then again came the droning voice of the crier:

"Rhadames, Rhadames, Rhadames! Kneel down and receive thy just sentence!"

Straining her ears, Amneris caught the fateful words. Oh horrors! He was to be entombed alive beneath the altar of the Temple!

Then indeed the anger of the Princess blazed forth. As the priests solemnly filed out of the Hall of Judgment, she bitterly upbraided them.

"Tigers! Demons!" she shrieked. "You are putting an innocent man to death!"

But Ramfis turned and sternly commanded silence. "The sentence of the gods is passed," he said; "and not even the Princess of Egypt can change it."

In a gloomy crypt below the altar of the Temple, Rhadames resigned himself to his fate. He was a soldier and had a soldier's superstitious belief that what must happen, must happen. He consoled himself that Aida, at any rate, was on her way to freedom.

What was his amazement, therefore, to see a white-robed figure stealing to him in the gloom. A moment more and she had laid her head upon his shoulder like a tired child.

"Aida!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it is I, beloved. I heard of thy doom, and I found means to hide myself and come to thee."

"But thou dids't not need to die. See—I would have died willingly for thy sweet sake!"

"But how could I live without thee, O my beloved! No, it is better so. In life the cruel fates separated us; but in death we may not be divided."

Slowly the light faded from their eyes, and the breath of life from their nostrils, but they were well content. They rested upon a huge gray stone as though it were a couch, and softly entered their last long sleep, clasped in each other's arms.

Above the crypt in the Temple, the priests of Isis chanted their sacrificial song. Over the stone which covered the crypt crouched a desolate figure. It was the once haughty Amneris. Too late she realized the magnitude of her sin, the folly of her selfishness; as the voices of the priests chanted the dirge, marking the last moments of the captives entombed below, the penitent Princess knelt in prayer.

THE BOHEMIAN GIRL

I

A HUNDRED or more years ago, the little city of Presburg, in Austria, was the center of a gay court life. Count Arnheim, who was the Governor by imperial decree, was a man who loved pomp, good living, and outdoor sports. So he gathered about him people of all sorts and conditions, at his revels in the castle.

On the morning when our story opens, the castle-yard was alive with movement. A hunt was being planned, and what with pages and other servants in livery, huntsmen in bright colors, and ladies come to bid their gallants godspeed, it was a bright and pleasing scene.

Darting here and there among the merry throng was a little girl, who was a great favorite with all the court. She was Arline, the Count's only child and the apple of his eye since the untimely death of his young wife, a few years before.

Another person who attracted attention, from different motives, was the Count's nephew, Florestein. He was a foppish fellow who loved to wear fine clothes and strut about. But he was as cowardly as he was conceited, as a little

incident presently showed. The servants came around distributing weapons for the chase, when at sight of the gun presented to him, the young fop sprang back.

"Oh dear, no!" he said. "I couldn't handle the beastly thing!"

A subdued titter ran around the crowd at his timidity.

Arline, however, begged her father to allow her to go to the hunt; and her entreaties were so urgent that the Count, who was over-indulgent, allowed himself to be partly persuaded. She was to go on a footpath with her nurse a little way, where she could watch at least the beginning of the chase after the lordly stags.

So away they all went, laughing and singing. The retainers returned to the interior of the castle, and the great court was deserted for the moment.

At this juncture a handsome youth came running forward seeking a place to hide. He was dressed in the garb of a Polish officer, and was in imminent danger of losing his life. Poland, his native land, was then at war with Austria; and Austrian soldiers were hunting him down as a spy.

Seeing that he had eluded his pursuers, the young man cast himself panting on the ground.

"I can run no further," he gasped, "even if I

die for it. Whither—oh whither shall I hide?"

He looked up, and there towering over him was a statue of the Austrian emperor himself. Full of despair and bitterness he struggled again to his feet and was looking for some other refuge, when a band of wild-looking gipsies suddenly sprang from the brush and surrounded him. They were headed by a big devil-may-care sort of chap, whose name, in fact was Devilshoof—a fellow with a certain rough joviality despite his evil looks.

"Here's easy pickings!" cried one, as they made as if to rob the fugitive.

"Hold hard," cautioned Devilshoof, seeing his uniform. "He's some sort of a soldier chap, and will have the whole army after us, if we aren't careful."

Which shows that Devilshoof had a wise head on his shoulders, for all his bravado.

Thaddeus—for that was the young Pole's name—on his part looked eagerly and hopefully at this band of ruffians. They offered his one means of escape.

"Good fellows," he said, "I am a hunted man—a Polish officer that the Austrians are seeking. There is a price set upon my head. I know not where to turn. Will you not let me join your band? I have a good right arm and a fearless heart."

Devilshoof looked him squarely in the eye, and Thaddeus returned the gaze unflinchingly. Each seemed satisfied with the inspection, for presently the gipsy's hand shot out and he clapped the other on the shoulder.

"A likely looking fellow for us! What say you, my boys?" he challenged.

The others were likewise pleased with the young stranger's appearance, and roared their approval.

Just then a cry of "The soldiers are coming!" rose from one on the outside. Quick as a flash Devilshoof began stripping the uniform off the fugitive and hiding it. Then they produced odd garments from among them—a shawl here, a sash there, a turban yonder—until behold! out stepped another gipsy.

Thaddeus made no protest at his sudden transformation, except to stoop and pick up quickly a roll of parchment with a seal attached, which had fallen to the ground.

"What's that?" demanded Devilshoof.

"That is my commission under my King," said Thaddeus proudly. "I shall never part with it while I have life to guard it."

And he tucked his precious paper inside his blouse, just as the Austrian soldiers entered on a run.

"Ho there, you vagabonds!" called their cap-

tain sharply. "Have you seen a Polish officer pass this way?"

"Was he a young fellow—about so high?" asked Delvishoof, actually pointing at Thaddeus himself.

"Yes, yes! where did he go?"

"We saw him running up the path yonder, just under the cliff."

The officer did not wait to hear any more, but dashed away with his men in the direction indicated.

The gipsy band laughed heartily at the ruse, and every fellow clapped the recruit heartily on the back, as their leader had done, and declared they would stick by him.

"Come, my jolly boys!" urged Devilshoof, cutting their jubilation short. "While the cat's away the mice will play. With all the court gone on the hunt, there ought to be good pickings for us hereabout."

The band scattered, Thaddeus with them. But he had not gone far before another uproar was heard. Cries of alarm came from the forest, and a crowd of peasants rushed frantically in.

"The little Countess!" they shrieked. "A ferocious stag is attacking her! She will be killed!"

Thaddeus, who came up behind them, waited to hear no more. He snatched up a rifle from

one of the throng, and dashed back into the forest. It was only a moment until the report of a gun was heard, then, in a little while, he returned carrying the child in his arms, just as the distracted father rushed upon the scene.

"Arline!" he gasped. "Is she safe?"

"Only slightly wounded in the arm," said one of the retainers, "but if it had not been for the quick action and bravery of this young gipsy, she would have been torn to pieces."

The Count folded his daughter to his breast; then turned and gave his hand to Thaddeus.

"You have made a lonely man your debtor for life," he said warmly. "You must at least stay and join us at our banquet to-day, as my guest."

Thaddeus thanked him, and would have declined, but reflecting that this would attract suspicion to himself and his new friends he reluctantly consented.

So many were being entertained that day, and so glorious was the weather, that the tables were brought out and laid under the shade of a grove of stately oaks. Here the revellers seated themselves—a light-hearted crowd indeed, since the one misadventure of the day had ended so happily. Singers and dancers disported themselves on the green, and the wine and ale flowed freely.

At the height of the entertainment, the Count

stood up to propose the usual patriotic toast.

"To the Emperor!" he cried, lifting his glass. And instantly every man sprang to his feet, clicked his heels together, and lifted his own glass.

Did I say, every man? No, there was one who sat stubbornly in his seat. It was the exile, Thaddeus. He might have escaped unnoticed, but for the officious fop, Florestein.

"See, uncle," he called. "Our queer guest does not see fit to honor the Emperor."

"Come, my friend," said the Count in annoyance. "Here is a bumper for the health of the Emperor." And he himself filled a glass and handed it to him.

"And thus I drink his health!" stormed Thaddeus, forgetting all discretion and throwing the glass, wine and all, full at the statue of the Emperor, where it shivered into a thousand fragments.

At once the table was in an uproar. Swords were drawn, and where there was lack of weapons, fists were waved. The man who dared thus to insult their ruler must be dealt with. The Count also sensed the danger and while reddening under the rebuff, he still bethought him of his debt to this young hothead. He sprang between Thaddeus and the crowd.

"Go, while you have the chance!" he said in

a low tone. "See, here is gold," thrusting a bag from his girdle into the young man's hand.

"I want not your gold, nor your gratitude, nor even your Emporer!" retorted Thaddeus.

And at this fresh insult the crowd closed upon him with a howl. But just then a burly figure appeared by his side. It was Devilshoof, with a grim smile on his face.

"I always did like a pretty fight," he said.

The Count, was still master of the situation.

"Seize these two lads and bind them!" he ordered.

It was the work of only a minute or two to carry out his order, and Devilshoof was escorted to a castle dungeon. But Thaddeus was taken to the forest, and there allowed to escape. The Count was magnanimous to the last.

The revellers again seated themselves to enjoy their interrupted banquet. A little thing like a brawl in those free-and-easy days was not permitted to take one's appetite. Again the wine flowed, and song and jest went around the board.

But a second time the feast was doomed to interruption—and this time, of a more serious nature. How it all happened nobody knew; but the nurse who was in charge of little Arline came down to the castle-yard on an errand. At this juncture, Devilshoof, whose audacity stopped at nothing, somehow obtained his liberty; and

roaming through the upper halls of the castle he came upon the child.

Seizing her in his arms, he escaped from the castle by a balcony window, and when first discovered he was clambering up the rocks with the agility of a chamois.

"Look!" screamed the nurse. "He is carrying off the child!"

Turning pale with fright, the Count leaped to his feet and started after the fugitive, his men stringing out in a line behind him. Madly they pursued him along the perilous trail, and were gaining on the outlaw, encumbered as he was with his burden, until he came to a deep but narrow gorge, spanned by a single tree trunk. Across this the fearless Devilshoof passed, then turned and with a kick of his foot dislodged the tree so that it fell hurtling into the chasm. Then he laughed at his enemies' discomfiture.

None dared fire at him, lest they hit the child. The Count in his despair was about to fling himself into the chasm, when he was seized and held by his retainers.

With a final mocking laugh, the gipsy disappeared in the depths of the forest.

II

Twelve years passed by without tidings of the lost girl. The Count's hair grew gray from sor-

row, but despite the liberal rewards which he had offered, his child had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed her up.

Then came a day when the gipsy band, of which Devilshoof was leader, came again to the town of Presburg. Meanwhile the child Arline had grown up into a beautiful young woman. With them also came Thaddeus, Arline's devoted attendant.

Devilshoof and some of his men took advantage of the nightfall to prowl about the street looking for victims.

" No violence, fellows," the leader continued. "Just ask for what you want politely—his watch, or money, or jewelry—and anybody will give it to you."

Which was doubtless true, judging from the villainous appearance of the gang.

As they waited outside the tavern who should appear but Florestein, the dandy of former years. He was still gorgeous of attire, but unfortunately was overfond of the wine bottle, as his staggering steps indicated.

To him came Devilshoof, who politely asked him what time of night it was. Florestein grew sober at once at sight of this man and the lurking figures back of him, but was powerless. He drew forth his watch to consult it, and Devilshoof, with a bow and "by your leave," trans-

ferred it to his own pocket. Then the other gipsies surrounded the courtier and went through his pockets quietly but thoroughly.

But just then unexpected aid came to their victim in the person of the gipsy Queen herself—a tall, dark woman of haughty mien. It did not suit her pleasure to have them committing robbery in the town, so she commanded them to return Florestein's property to him. This they did, grumblingly.

"Is that all?" she asked him.

"Yes—all," he said, looking it over, "except a medallion studded with gems. I thought more of that than all the rest."

"Well, you'll never see that again," said one of the gipsies. "Devilshoof's gone off with it."

Florestein sighed deeply and went his way, thankful that it had been no worse. At a sign from the Queen, the gipsies followed her.

Arline had been awakened by the commotion, and now came out of her tent, where she was met by the faithful Thaddeus.

"I have had such a strange dream, Thaddeus," she said.

"What was it?"

"I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls, with vassals and serfs at my side. Tell me, Thaddeus, was I always a gipsy like this? Sometimes I

have far-off memories of another, very different life."

Thaddeus at first evaded her questions, but she pointed to a scar on her arm, and asked, "How did I get that?"

"You were only a little girl when that happened," he answered readily. "You were six years old and had gone out with your nurse for a walk when a wild stag attacked you. But fortunately he was killed before he did more than gore you once on the arm."

Thaddeus did not tell her that he had been her rescuer; nor did he reveal to her that she was of noble birth, for he feared that he might lose her. Now when she sang a tender song telling of her dream and ending,

> **But I also dreamt—which pleased me most—**
> **That you loved me still the same,**

he drew her to him and told her he would love and protect her for always.

At this moment, the gipsy Queen came stalking forward in a towering rage. She had witnessed the lovers' embrace.

"How dare you!" she stormed at Arline. "I have chosen this man for myself."

Arline, however, had plenty of courage, so giving the Queen look for look, she drew away and said that Thaddeus should choose between

them for himself. Thaddeus lost no time in going back to Arline and taking her hand.

While the discomfited Queen still glowered, Devilshoof entered and at once took in the situation. He liked nothing better than a jest, unless it was a fight.

"Ho, ho!" he said, "a fine-looking pair it is! Do you turtle-doves want to get married?"

"Yes!" said Thaddeus boldly.

"Yes!" murmured Arline, blushing.

"Then there's no time like the present. Come!"—addressing the Queen—"it's your job to unite this handsome couple. Join their hands!"

The rest of the band came in and grinned at her expectantly. The Queen hesitated but a moment more, then stepped forward and joined the hands of Thaddeus and Arline in wedlock. This was the gipsy ceremony of marriage, and the band made merry in celebration of the event.

But the Queen nursed hatred in her heart, and already began to plan how she might rid herself of this rival. In furtherance of her plot she went to Devilshoof and demanded of him the medallion which he had stolen from Florestein. Devilshoof dared not refuse, and handed it to her.

The next morning there was a street fair in Presburg, which was the main reason why the gipsy band had chosen to come there at that

time. The town was gaily decorated. Booths were placed along the streets, and there were jugglers, mountebanks, fakirs, and merchants here, there and everywhere, among the sight-seers and merrymakers. You can well believe, also, that Devilshoof and his gang mingled with the throng and did not disdain to pick up a dishonest penny.

Meanwhile, the pretty Arline gained her pennies honestly by selling flowers and telling fortunes. All went well with her until she chanced to pass Florestein, who at once began trying to flirt with her.

"Ah, my pretty wench!" he exclaimed, trying to put his arm around her waist. "Can you not tell my fortune?"

"Yes—you are going to get your ears boxed, sir!" she retorted, suiting the action to the word.

The fop retreated in confusion, while the crowd laughed. The gipsy Queen observed the incident and stepped quickly forward. She had recognized Florestein as the victim of the robbery the evening before, and to further her own evil designs she said to Arline:

"You are a brave girl, and deserve a reward. Here, wear this."

And she placed the medallion around Arline's neck.

Before the girl had quite realized what it was

that the Queen had given her, Florestein came back and recognized his jewel. Smarting for revenge and too much of a coward to stand up for his own rights—especially since Thaddeus was standing by the girl's side—he summoned the guards and ordered them to arrest her as a thief. Thaddeus tried to interfere but was overpowered, and Arline was led into the Hall of Justice by the guards and the triumphant dandy.

The Count himself was acting as judge, and just now, in an inner room, he was looking at the portraits of his dead wife and his long-lost daughter, and giving himself up to painful thoughts.

"But memory is the only friend that grief can call its own!" he sighed.

Just then the officious Florestein came bursting in without ceremony.

"Uncle!" he cried. "I demand justice!"

And pointing to the trembling Arline, he accused her of stealing his medallion.

The Count looked at his harum-scarum nephew in some disgust, then turned his attention to the maiden who stood before him.

"You do not look like a thief, my child!" he said gently. "How came you by the jewel?"

Arline told how the Queen had given her the

medallion, and she had accepted it, not knowing it was stolen goods.

"Have you any witnesses to prove your story?" asked the Count.

Arline looked wildly round the room. The gipsies had scattered, and Thaddeus had been prevented from following her.

"Alas! no," she answered.

"Then I must give you up to justice. You must go to prison, awaiting trial."

"No, there is a way out!" exclaimed the proud girl; and drawing a dagger she was about to stab herself, when the Count sprang forward and arrested the blow.

As he did so, her sleeve fell back exposing her arm, and he saw the scar.

"Tell me about that!" he demanded hoarsely, a great hope filling his heart. "Who are you? How did you get that wound?"

And when Arline, in clear, sweet tones related the story of the stag's attack, as Thaddeus had told her, the Count with a cry of joy folded her in his arms.

"You are my little girl!—my long lost child!" he cried; while Florestein and the crowd looked on in amazement at the unexpected turn of affairs.

III

Arline's dream had come true. Now indeed she dwelt in marble halls, with vassals and serfs at her side.

The Count seemed to grow young again in the joy of finding this beautiful daughter after twelve years of searching. He gazed upon her in rapture, and saw again the loved features of the bride he had never ceased to mourn. He gave a wonderful reception in her honor, and introduced her to the lords and ladies, with a world of pride in his voice.

And the girl herself, now clad in silks and velvets, seemed always to have been a part of this gay picture, instead of living the rough life of the gipsy camp for so many years. But inwardly she was not happy. She remembered the old carefree days with Thaddeus, with inexpressible longing.

He, also, as we may well believe, was inconsolable over the loss of his sweetheart. In a fit of desperation he persuaded Devilshoof to go with him to the castle. They clambered up the same balcony by which the gipsy had once escaped, and surprised Arline in her own room. Forgetting all caution she sprang into her lover's arms.

It was Devilshoof's voice which recalled them to their present situation.

"There's someone coming! Look out for yourselves! I'll have to beat it!"

And out the window he sprang, as footsteps were heard along the corridor.

Arline realized that she must conceal her lover at once, and trust to a more propitious time to present him to her father. Looking quickly around the room she noted an alcove in which her garments were hung. She thrust Thaddeus in there, and pulled a curtain across—and not a moment too soon.

Her father entered with Florestein and a group of courtiers.

"My dear child," he said, "it is time you were thinking of marriage, and I have yielded to my ward, Florestein's entreaties, and chosen him for your future husband."

Arline shrank back from his words as from a blow, but before she had time to voice her protest, another interruption occurred.

The jealous gipsy Queen had followed Devilshoof and Thaddeus from afar, and witnessed their entrance into Arline's room. She had seen Devilshoof later make his escape, so she reasoned that Thaddeus must still be in the apartment. Now she boldly climbed up the balcony and suddenly appeared through the window.

"Who art thou, intruder?" challenged the Count sharply.

"One who bears a message for thee," retorted the Queen. "Know that thy daughter is deceiving thee. Even now she has a lover concealed somewhere under this roof."

"Thou liest!" cried the Count.

"See for thyself!" exclaimed the Queen whose quick black eyes had seen the curtained alcove.

The Count stepped across the room and tore the curtain from its fastenings. Thaddeus stepped forth in full view of the company. After one gasp of amazement and horror, the Count drew his sword.

"Go, before I slay you!" he commanded harshly.

"No, father, I cannot let him go—alone!" protested Arline, rushing forward.

But again the Count interposed.

"Go!" he exclaimed.

Thaddeus bit his lip, but turned proudly to leave the room.

Arline cast herself at her father's feet.

"Father, listen to me," she cried. "He it was who saved me from the stag, years ago—don't you remember? He has been my protector ever since, and has guarded me from all harm. I love him dearly, and he loves me."

"But the daughter of a Count cannot wed with a common gipsy," said her father sternly. "Have you no pride?"

Thaddeus could keep silent no longer. At the risk of death from his enemies he must speak out. He thrust his hand into his jacket and drew out a faded parchment.

"Sir," he said, "I am not the common gipsy you think me. I bear a royal commission in the Polish army, and my blood is as noble as yours."

The Count read the document, then looked at the handsome pair before him. He remembered again his own romance.

"The storms of a nation's strife should never part true lovers," he said finally. "My daughter —thy hand!" And he placed it within that of the overjoyed Thaddeus.

As they stood united at last, a cry of warning came from the window. The jealous Queen had commanded one of her tribe to shoot Thaddeus. But Devilshoof coming quickly behind the fellow, knocked his arm to one side just as he was pulling the trigger of his musket.

There was a loud report, and with a scream the gipsy Queen herself fell to the fioor, her heart pierced by the bullet she had intended for another.

CARMEN

I

HIGH noon in the Spanish city of Seville, with all its bustle and color. Crowds were going back and forth to their midday repast, or resting idly here and there under the shade of the cool verandas. Pigeons circled hither and yon, their wings flashing against the blue of the sky. In the center of the square a fountain splashed. It was a picture of gayety and beauty.

A company of soldiers resting in the square added a martial note to the scene. Just at present a few were on guard duty, the others after marching in being permitted to lounge with the civilians during the heat of the day.

All this throng, however, was a source of dismay to a modest young girl whose dress proclaimed her as just from the country. She glanced about her timidly as though in search of someone, and was on the point of beating a hasty retreat, when a jovial soldier hailed her.

"Looking for someone, Senorita?" he asked politely.

"Yes—that is—I would like to find a young officer, Don Jose by name. Do you know him?"

"Indeed I do. He is a sergeant of the guard, and is due here any minute when we relieve the present guard."

"Oh, very well," said the girl, whose name was Michaela, "I will look for him later."

"What is your haste?" asked the soldier, attracted by her pretty face. "Stay and talk to us awhile. Then I will point out Jose the moment he comes on duty."

But the soldier's glances were so bold, that the shy country girl thanked him in a low tone and fled.

She had been gone but a few moments when a blast of trumpets announced that the guard was to be changed. In marched a new squad of soldiers with Jose at their head. He was a fine, upstanding type of soldier, but his handsome face had a reckless look. Perhaps that was why he had turned soldier, instead of staying at home to till the farm and take care of his aged mother.

Facing one side of the square was a large cigarette factory, in which many girls found employment. Now during their noon rest hour they were having a gay time of it singing and dancing here and there, and flirting with the soldiers. They were a madcap lot, but the greatest madcap of them all was a wild-looking beauty called Carmen.

Carmen came of gipsy stock, as one might

see from her flashing black eyes, her red, red cheeks, and her lissome figure. Carmen could laugh and tease and command all in one look. She was a born coquette, and was never so happy as when starting some new love affair. With her adventure was the breath of life.

To-day as she darted here and there in the square, she was followed by many hangers-on, both girls and young men. But none of the latter pleased her at this moment, as she had caught sight of Don Jose among the soldiers. He was a newcomer and looked interesting. She would set her cap for him.

But Jose was at first indifferent. He had heard that Michaela was looking for him, and thoughts of her recalled his peaceful home, and the mother who desired most of all to see him happily wedded to this childhood's sweetheart. Ah, that would be fine, he thought, some day when he had tired of the army. But just now—

Why does that factory girl with the bold black eyes look at him, as she sings? And what is it she is singing?

Love is like a woodbird wild
That none can ever hope to tame;
All in vain is wooing mild
If he refuse your heart to claim.

When Carmen finished her song her eyes met and held Jose's for a moment; then she flung a

red rose at him and darted away to the factory, as the one o'clock gong sounded.

Jose picked up the rose in a daze and pinned it on his coat; then turned to find the gentle Michaela greeting him. She had come all the way from home to bring him a letter from his mother, with a little gift of money in it. Tears came to the young officer's eyes at this new evidence of her devotion.

"How is she, Michaela?" he asked.

"Fairly well, but as you know she is getting old. She longs for you, and I think—"

But she could not complete her message, and stood blushing.

"I know," said Jose, putting his arm around her. "You tell my dear old mother that I mean to get a leave of absence just as soon as I can, and come home. Then we can make her happy in another way, eh, Michaela?"

And he kissed her tenderly and bade her farewell. As for Michaela, poor child, she set out from Seville for her home, as though walking on air. She had loved her foster brother dearly ever since she could remember. Often he was careless and thoughtless, but these few rare moments of tenderness were worth all the rest.

Jose read his mother's letter and a warm glow entered his heart. Yes, he would be a better son,

he reflected. And as for the sweet-faced Michaela—

His happy thoughts were cut short by a shrill scream which came from the factory door.

"Help! help! She's killing us all!" came a girl's voice.

Jose did not need his superior officer's command to dash forward to the rescue. He found the cigarette girls in a panic. One of them lay on the floor, with an ugly wound in her side, while Carmen, looking like a young panther, was daring them to come on.

The quarrel had arisen through the jealousy of the other girls for the gipsy's popularity. They had tried to get even by constant teasing ever since noon, until at last in a rage Carmen had turned on the ringleader with a stiletto and struck her down. She was still waving the stiletto when the soldiers entered.

They quickly disarmed her and led her out into the square, before the commanding officer, Zuniga.

"You are entirely too free with your claws, my girl," he stormed. "We will have to put you out of harm's way for awhile. Here, Sergeant —to Jose—"take charge of this young catamount, and see that she doesn't do any more scratching."

Jose led her aside somewhat unwillingly, while

the other soldiers marched off. He was still thinking of his mother and Michaela, and now recalled with a start that he was wearing this girl's rose.

As for Carmen she rather liked the situation. Now she could talk with this distant young man; and she certainly had no intention of going to jail.

"I like you," she began suddenly.

"Er—is that so?" he replied.

"Yes, and I think you like me just a little bit, too—now don't you?"

"Why—yes, I guess so."

"Oh, I know you do, or you wouldn't be wearing my rose," she cooed.

As she continued to exert all her powers of fascination, the young officer was drawn to her in spite of himself. He cut the cords which bound her hands, and she thanked him prettily.

"You are too kind to lock me up in that prison," she pleaded. "See—I'll tell you what to do. As we march away up the path—so—I will walk just ahead of you—so. And then all of a sudden I will put out my foot— so—and trip you up. You will fall and I will run away."

"Ah, but what reward do I get?" asked the foolish Jose.

"Have I not told you that I like you?" laughed the girl. "I shall run away to my father's camp

—the gipsies—up in the mountains. You can join me there, and we can be, so happy!"

Jose was so infatuated by this dashing girl that he could not refuse her. He fell in with her plan, and as another detachment of the guard appeared, he marched with her toward the prison. She suddenly tripped him up, and he tumbled to the ground, while she ran away, with a mocking laugh.

But the ruse did not deceive Captain Zuniga, who just then appeared on the scene.

"I might have known you would make a fool of yourself," he sneered. "And yet I thought you were safe. Ho, fellows! Lock him up in the guardhouse, and let's see if he can guard himself any better than a petticoat!"

And without further ado, Jose found himself under guard and disgraced. Fate had chalked up the first black mark against him, because of Carmen.

II

Once at liberty, Carmen lost no time in returning to the gipsy band. Their daring, lawless ways were more to her liking than the city. The outlaws were just then doing a thriving business in smuggling goods across the border. They had a mountain retreat and also used as a sort

of halfway station a tavern just outside of Seville. Here Carmen tarried for a time, partly to await the release of Jose, whom she had promised to meet.

This tavern was a favorite resort of the soldiers, who did not know that the landlord was in league with the smugglers. They did know, however, that there were good things to eat and drink, and pretty girls to sing and dance with. And again Carmen was in her element.

Captain Zuniga often came here, when off duty, and while he recognised Carmen as the girl who had escaped arrest, he preferred to forget this and seek her favor. But she would not smile upon him, and he, guessing the reason why, said, one evening:

"Do not frown upon me so, pretty charmer. I will tell you something nice if you will smile a little."

"What is that?" she asked scornfully.

"Why, that sergeant of yours—that young fellow you bowled over so completely, you remember—he was set at liberty to-day."

Carmen's heart beat a little faster, but she hid her feelings behind a toss of her head, and danced out of the room.

That same evening there was a grand torchlight procession in Seville, and from the popular rejoicing one would have thought that a new

king was being crowned, or a great general had returned from a victory. But instead it was all in honor of a bull-fighter! His name was Escamillo, whose victory that day in the arena had made him the popular idol.

After most of the festivities were over, he and a small party of friends entered this wayside tavern to rest and refresh themselves. But if they expected to have a quiet time of it they were mistaken; for again an admiring crowd collected, and made the toreador, nothing loath, strut back and forth and tell again of his performances.

In the thick of it was the black-eyed gipsy girl. She looked at the fine trappings and gold ornaments of this young bull-fighter—and forgot Jose—at least temporarily! She began to pirouette around the new flame, until he in turn began to notice her. However, when flushed with wine, he tried to make advances to her, she repulsed him. She remembered again the man who went to jail for her sake. But although she would not encourage Escamillo, she did not discourage him. She was too much of a flirt for that. When the toreador departed he had a half promise from her to meet him again.

After the rest had gone she lingered, although some of the smugglers wished her to join them on an expedition that night. And, as she ex-

pected, Jose himself did keep his tryst with her. He was somewhat downcast after his experience in the guardhouse, and he still had uneasy twinges when he remembered his mother and sweetheart, but Carmen soon drove all this out of his head. She was honestly delighted to see him again, and sang and danced until he quite entered into the spirit of her wild mood.

But all too soon a bugle call was heard outside and Jose rose hastily.

"It is my recall to quarters," he said.

"Must you go so soon?" she pouted.

"I must—or risk another session in the guardhouse," he smiled grimly.

"Oh, bother the old army!" she cried stamping her foot. "I hate rules and regulations!"

Which was literally true.

"It is a soldier's duty," persisted Jose, still going to the door.

"Listen—Jose—" she pleaded clinging to his coat. "Why be a soldier and have to take orders from that hateful captain of yours? Come with me! We will go to the gipsy camp up in the mountains—just you and I—and be happy and free—and snap our fingers at these old captains!"

The poor, weak Jose hesitated, and there is no telling what would have been his answer, had not Fate just then dealt him another scurvy

trick. The door was thrown open, and there stood Zuniga himself upon the threshold.

"So!" he exclaimed, infuriated at seeing the girl who had repulsed him clinging to his sergeant. "This is the way you obey orders! Evidently one session in the cooler was not enough for you!"

In he stalked brandishing his sword.

"Out with you!" he commanded.

Jose's fighting blood was up. One cannot be ordered around like that when a pretty woman is looking on.

"Get out yourself!" said the foolish sergeant, and crossed swords with his superior officer.

Carmen was secretly delighted. Now she knew she had Jose within her toils. Before the men could do much fighting, she called for help, and the smugglers rushed in.

"Seize him!" she cried, pointing to the captain.

And in less time than it takes to tell about it, Zuniga was trussed like a fowl and left helpless and cursing upon the floor, while Carmen, Jose, and the rest of the crowd departed for their mountain retreat.

III

Since Fate had thus dealt the cards for him, Jose did not struggle further. He yielded to the fascination of the gipsy girl, and made the

life of the band his own. There were still moments when he bitterly regretted the step he had taken, but he dulled his conscience by deeds of reckless daring with the smugglers. There was no risk he would not take, for he knew that death would be preferable to capture. He was a deserter, and a price was set upon his head.

Strangely enough, he never reproached Carmen for his undoing. He became more and more infatuated with her, and he might have been almost happy if her old, fickle nature had not asserted itself. Now that she had enslaved Jose, she began to tire of him, and to think of new conquests. How handsome had that toreador looked, she thought to herself!

As if in answer to this thought, Escamillo himself appeared in the camp, not long thereafter. He came near to being shot dead for his temerity. Jose had been placed on guard duty while the others were away. Seeing the skulker he raised his musket and fired. The stranger, however, leaped aside just in time, then announced loudly that he was Escamillo, the toreador, and came as a friend.

Jose lowered his weapon, glad that he had missed the intruder, and ready to welcome this famous hero into the camp. But his welcome turned into jealous rage when Escamillo calmly

stated that he had come to seek a gipsy girl named Carmen.

Carmen herself answered the query, by rushing forward with a glad cry. Jose was beside himself with fury, to see them embrace.

"Do you know the price a gipsy demands, when a rival tries to take his sweetheart from him?" he asked in a hoarse voice, at the same time drawing his dagger.

"So? That is the way the land lies, is it?" asked the toreador coolly. "I am accustomed to fighting bulls, but I can fight men too."

And he drew his own dagger in turn.

The other smugglers returned just in time to prevent bloodshed. As they resented the presence of this stranger in camp, he bade them a laughing farewell, and invited them all down to Seville the next week to the bull fight.

"Come and see what a real fight is like!" he called as he went off whistling down the mountain.

Ere Jose cooled off from his outburst, another upsetting incident occurred. The gipsies had found another straggler, whom they brought in with them, and who stood shuddering at all this uproar and turmoil. It was Michaela, again braving unknown dangers to bring a message to Jose.

Instantly he was by her side, repentant.

"Michaela, you here? What brings you?" he asked reassuring her from her terror.

"Jose—it is your mother. She is dying. She calls for you. She calls for you!"

"Then we will go to her at once," he answered with decision. And as some of the men tried to stop him, he thrust them away.

"I go to my mother," he said; "but I shall return. And as for you"—looking sternly at Carmen—"if you prove false to me your life shall pay for it!"

But the reckless girl only laughed.

IV

It was the day of the great bull-fight in Seville. All business had ceased, as though it were a national holiday, and the gay throngs poured through the gates into the big amphitheatre surrounding the arena. Outside the gates surged a motley throng—peddlers of every kind of trinket and dainty, dealers in hot tamales and frijoles, old gipsies with marvellous laces for sale, fortune tellers, beggars, and the usual swarm of small boys beseeching the passers-by for the price of an entrance ticket.

One man's name was on every one's tongue. He was greater than the king himself that day. He was a demigod—Escamillo! They related in awestruck voices how he had killed six bulls

on the last occasion; and wagers were made as to the number he would dispose of to-day.

Presently their chatter changed into a roar of welcome. The great toreador himself was coming! They crowded around him as he at last entered, striving for a word or a glance from him. How splendid he looked—how fearless—how superhuman!

He smiled right and left, showing his white teeth and beautiful dark eyes, and kissing his fingers toward all the pretty girls. He was quite a ladies' man, was Escamillo, and by his side was his latest conquest—Carmen!

She was in her element—the center of an excited, merry throng. She shared the reflected glory of this fine new lover of hers, and all was smiles and sunshine. After all, why shouldn't one be gay? One could be young but once.

After her lover had entered the arena to prepare for the fray, her elbow was nudged excitedly by one of her girl friends.

"Carmen!" she called in a low, frightened voice, "you had better not stay around here. Don Jose has returned to town, and he has sworn to kill you."

"Poof! *That* I care for Don Jose and his threats!" said Carmen, snapping her fingers.

She was not quite so bold, however, when Jose presently entered the square. He came up

to her, but very quietly and sadly. He had lost his mother and was in no mood to quarrel with anyone.

"I thought you were going to murder me," greeted the girl recklessly.

"No, Carmen," he replied. "I have come to ask you to go away with me. I have a quiet, country home, which my mother has left to me. There we can forget the old life and start in anew the right way."

"An exciting time we would have of it!" she jeered, turning away.

"Carmen, you must come! I love you!"

The girl laughed mockingly. Just then a tremendous burst of applause came from the arena. Escamillo had evidently slain his first bull.

"Let me go!" said the girl, striving to pass.

"Where? To Escamillo?"

"Yes—if you must know."

"You shall not go!" Jose cried, his rage beginning to mount again.

"I shall!" And once again she tried to push him aside.

There was a flash of steel in the sunlight, and the girl sank with a moan. Jose had made good his threat. He had stabbed her to the heart. Jose stared down at her like a man in a dream. All his anger was gone. The woman he loved, and who had wrecked his life, lay dead at his

feet. Never to his own last breath would he be able to wipe out this memory.

Another salvo of applause shook the amphitheatre, and Escamillo, flushed with victory, came out to receive his sweetheart's congratulations. Then he paused to look in amazement at the prostrate figure that a few short minutes before had been his gay laughing Carmen. And as he stood there the roar of the throng still resounded in his ears:

"Escamillo! Escamillo! Live forever!"

FAUST

I

MANY years ago in a certain city in Germany, an aged philosopher sat poring over his books. He was known far and wide as the famous Dr. Faust, and so wonderful had been his work in his laboratory, that many people accused him of magic.

On this night, however, as he sat there, his soul was filled with bitterness. What was the good of it all? he asked himself. He had given his life to his books, and now he bemoaned his lost youth. He was lonely. He was weary. He wanted to die and end it all.

Reaching for one of the decanters which stood upon his table, he poured himself a poisonous draught. The first rays of the morning sun were just peeping through his windows, as he lifted the deadly cup to his lips. One deep quaff, he thought, and then—but just at this moment his hand was arrested by the sound of singing in the street below. It was the voices of sturdy reapers on the way to the fields. They were giving thanks to God for his goodness and bounty.

Faust hurled the cup to the floor in a fit of fury.

"God!" he mocked. "They pray and give thanks to God! While I would sell my soul to the Devil if he would only grant me my desire!"

This impious remark was hardly out of his mouth when there was a clap of thunder, a burst of smoke, and the Evil One himself stood before him. He was not a fearsome object. He was dressed, indeed, as any other gallant of the day, with a long curling feather in his cap, satin doublet and pantaloons, silken hose, and pointed shoes; while a jeweled sword hung at his side. But his entire costume was a fiery red, and one could almost imagine flashes of fire darting from his mocking eyes.

"You called me," he greeted, "and here I am!"

"Who are you?" asked the old student, drawing back, for he knew well enough the identity of his guest.

"Men call me Mephistopheles," he answered. "I have power to bring you the happiness you seek. What would you have—gold? Fame? Power?"

"No—none of these things. Begone!" quaked the old man.

"But—you summoned me. Come, what is it?

Only tell me, and it shall be yours—on one condition."

The philosopher still hesitated; but the tempter's smile was so friendly, that at last he said:

"My lost youth! I would have it back again—with all my power to love and be happy."

"Nothing easier," reassured Mephistopheles. "I will give you back your youth—you shall live your life over again—if you will sell me your soul!"

Saying which, the fiend unrolled a scroll of parchment, laid it before Faust upon the table, and bade him sign his name to it.

Faust drew back in horror at this. It seemed too dreadful to contemplate. Then his visitor with a mocking smile caused the wall of his study to melt away, and there before his gaze appeared an entrancing vision. It was a young peasant girl who sat by her spinning wheel, and spun and sang. As she sang she lifted her lovely eyes and seemed to look straight into those of Faust. Then the picture faded, leaving the old man stretching out his arms.

"She shall be yours!" whispered the Evil One. "I will give you youth—and love! Only sign."

Again he pushed the document in front of Faust, and with trembling hands the student signed his name to the contract, binding his soul to Satan forever.

The fiend picked up the goblet which had lately held the poison, and poured a magic potion therein, and extended it to his new victim.

"Drink!" he commanded.

Faust did so, and was at once transformed from an aged man to a handsome youth. He was clad in garments as rich as those of his guest, and looked every inch a noble. He drew his flashing sword and saluted his mentor. Mephistopheles looked at his gallant figure approvingly.

"Come!" he said, pointing to the world without, now irradiated by the morning sun.

II

That same day, the two gallants—for such they appeared to be—might have been seen making their way into the old town of Nuremberg. A fair was in progress, and the townspeople were making merry. Rollicking young students, pretty milkmaids, sedate burghers, prim matrons, peasants, strolling actors, were among the jolly throng. Then there was a company of soldiers just ready to march away to the wars, but who were pausing for some last farewells with the rosy-cheeked lasses in the village square.

Among the soldiers was a young man, Valen-

tin, who held back with evident reluctance. It was not from lack of courage, but because of the fact that by going away he left his only sister, Marguerite, alone in the world. Their parents were both dead, and he had been her only near relative. Now his heart misgave him as he thought of leaving her. But at this moment a young but comely boy stepped forward and greeted him.

"I know what is troubling you, Valentin," said Siebel, for that was his name. "Give yourself no anxiety over Marguerite. I will be her champion."

The soldier was at first tempted to smile at the youth's remark, but on second thought he looked straight into the lad's earnest eyes and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed. "I commend her to your care—with a brother's thanks!"

At this juncture, while the merry soldiers were singing and toasting each other, Faust and Mephistopheles entered the circle. The last-named, never gifted with modesty, pushed himself forward.

"Do you call that singing?" he sneered. "Listen to me!"

And he launched forthwith upon a song in praise of the Calf of Gold. His listeners did not understand much about it, but as the deep,

rich tones of his voice rang out they could not refrain from applause.

"Thanks, thanks, my friends!" said Mephistopheles bowing right and left. "And now to add to the gayety of the occasion, let's have some fortune-telling."

The crowd pressed around him laughing and eager for this new diversion. He glanced at the palms of one and another, making shrewd, satirical remarks, which highly delighted every one of the throng except the victims of his barbed shafts. Then seeing young Siebel hanging back, he beckoned him forward. Despite his instinctive dislike, Siebel felt constrained to obey.

"Here's a funny state of affairs!" jeered Mephistopheles. "This young fellow seems to be under some sort of a curse. Every flower he touches henceforth is doomed to wither and die."

Siebel shrank back at this, and Valentin, who had overheard the banter, drew near scowling darkly. But his scowl turned into a snarl of rage when Mephistopheles, as if to provoke a quarrel, picked up a glass of wine and proposed a toast.

"To Marguerite!" he proposed, with a sinister smile in the direction of Siebel and Valentin.

"You cur!" shouted Valentin, sensing an insult in this stranger's remarks. Drawing his sword he advanced upon Mephistopheles; while

behind him came others of his soldier friends intent upon hemming in the scurrilous fortune-teller.

Mephistopheles quickly drew a circle around him upon the ground, which glowed with a fiery radiance. Standing within the center he snapped his fingers at the soldiers. At once they realized that it was the Demon himself whom they were fighting. Lifting up their swords hilt upwards, in the form of crosses, they continued to advance. Before this symbol, Mephistopheles cringed abjectly and beat a hasty retreat.

Once rid of their unwelcome visitor the crowd resumed its merrymaking. A dance was begun upon the village green, and Faust, who thus far had taken no part in it, drew near fascinated. This was all so foreign to his staid life of study. It was good to be young, to be free!

However, if he found pleasure in idly watching the festival crowd at play, it was as nothing to the thrill he presently experienced. From the doorway of the church across the square a village maiden was approaching. As she drew near, his heart beat like a trip-hammer. It was Marguerite, the girl of his vision, but looking a hundred times lovelier in real life.

Swayed by some irresistible impulse he approached her and offered her his arm.

"Will you dance with me?" he begged.

She lifted her eyes to those of the stranger, whom she saw for the first time, and then dropped them in confusion.

"No," she said gently but firmly turning away from him.

III

"Ho, ho!" laughed Mephistopheles.

He had watched from afar the first attempt of Faust to play the gallant, and his consequent repulse. He now took it upon himself to jeer at Faust for his clumsiness, but at the same time offered to aid him still further, as he had promised.

Faust was so eager to make the acquaintance of the lovely Marguerite, that he bore his mentor's mocking jibes in silence.

"Lead on!" he finally said, shortly, and the Evil One nodded his head in assent.

They left the city square and made their way to one of the quiet streets near its outskirts. Here, sitting well back in a charming old-fashioned garden was Marguerite's cottage; and here, now that her brother had departed, she dwelt alone save for an elderly companion, Martha by name.

As the two gallants approached, they saw Siebel hastily departing. He, poor boy, had long

felt a hopeless affection for Marguerite, and today was giving expression to it by leaving a garland of flowers on her doorstep. Siebel had been filled with dismay to find that every flower he had touched, since he met the sinister fortune-teller, withered in his grasp. After trying repeatedly to pluck a nosegay for his beloved, he turned in despair and dipped his fingers in holy water at the church door. Then to his joy the curse was lifted. He was enabled to bring a new offering of flowers to Marguerite, which remained fresh and fragrant.

Mephistopheles noticed them lying there, and in order to distract the maiden's attention, he produced a casket of jewels, and set it down on the doorstep beside the garland. Then he withdrew with Faust into a clump of trees to await the result.

Presently Marguerite entered the garden, singing happily to herself. She saw the wreath of flowers, and doubtless knowing whence they came merely smiled a little and laid them aside. The casket, however, was new and mysterious looking. It promised to be exciting. She knelt before it and raised the lid.

Immediately, a cry of childish delight burst from her lips. She drew forth a string of rich pearls, held them with looks of awe for a moment, and placed them around her neck. A glor-

ious pendant came next; then rings such as she had never dreamed of possessing. It seemed all too good to be true. While she marvelled at their beauty, she wondered what cavalier could have made such a priceless gift to her. Then she remembered the handsome stranger who had spoken to her, only that morning. Could it be he? she asked herself—then smiled, shook her head, and began again to caress these dazzling gems.

"What have you got there?" asked a sudden voice. It was Martha the old gossip, who had come upon the maiden, and whose tones seemed like the voice of Conscience.

"Take them off!" said the older woman gruffly. "You do not know anything about them. They may be left with evil intent."

Marguerite listened to her, wide-eyed, and began slowly to unclasp the pearls from her neck. At this moment Mephistopheles drew his companion forward, and himself bowed gracefully.

"You would do us an injustice, madame, if you refuse these trifling gems," he said to Marguerite. "See, here is my friend, who earnestly desires to see you. As for you, dear lady,"—turning to Martha—"I have a message for you that I am sure you will be interested to hear."

"What is it?" asked Martha pricking up her ears.

He beckoned her mysteriously to one side, and the dame, always eager for a bit of gossip, followed him to a secluded corner of the garden. There the wily Mephistopheles poured into her ears such a string of small talk that she totally forgot her charge.

Meanwhile, poor Marguerite was strolling back and forth in the garden, as in a daze. Never in her simple life had she been wooed as now by this dashing stranger. His conversation flashed like the jewels she was wearing. He told her that she had been his lifelong dream. So resistless was his impassioned speech that when he finally asked her if she could not learn to love him, she answered,

"I already love you!"

And she lifted her lips to his.

From the far-off corner of the garden, Mephistopheles paused long enough in his own tete-a-tete, to laugh sardonically. His pupil was proving apt indeed!

IV

Some months passed by. Faust and his dark companion still came at times to Marguerite's garden, and the poor girl continued to see her lover. But ugly whispers had gone about the

neighborhood, and now as Marguerite wended her lonely way to church or to the market-place, her neighbors gave her the cold shoulder. They said that the maiden had sinned before God and man, and was no longer fit to associate with decent people.

Full of grief and remorse, Marguerite sought to find at the church the innocence and happiness she had lost. But even as she knelt in prayer, a vision of the Demon and his mocking smile was ever before her eyes. She felt that she was doomed forever.

Only one friend remained true to her, in this sad time. It was young Siebel, who still loved her, and sought to shield her. But he was powerless against the Evil One. While he lingered near her cottage, one evening, who should enter but Valentin, returned from the wars. His company had been granted home leave, and he had hastened back to Nuremberg, eager to see his beloved sister again, and to hear from her lips the praises which he felt he had justly earned.

When he reached home, however, Marguerite was not there. She was at the church, still seeking forgiveness. From Siebel's faltering lips Valentin heard the tragic story, how his sister's fair name had been sullied by these two cavaliers

whom nobody knew anything about, and who still lingered in the town.

"They say," said the youth, "that one of them is the Evil One himself. And, indeed, it does not seem that anyone else could have brought such sorrow and shame to your sister."

Valentin heard him with astonishment and anger.

"Run and fetch her here at once!" he commanded. "I would hear her story from her own lips."

Siebel hastened to the church, as he was bid, and Valentin paced up and down the path in a frenzy of emotion. Suddenly he heard footsteps, and perceived Faust and Mephistopheles approaching. Deciding to watch their actions before revealing himself, he hid behind a clump of bushes.

Mephistopheles, as usual, was in a jeering mood, and sought to rouse the drooping spirits of his companion by making light of the whole situation. He carried a guitar upon which he thrummed, preparing for a serenade. But an evil song it was, which welled from his lips! Every word smote the listening Valentin like a whiplash. It was a jest upon his sister's honor.

Again, as upon that former occasion when he sought to protect her, he sprang forward sword in hand. This time the Demon did not avoid

him. Drawing his own weapon he coolly parried the savage lunges of the infuriated brother. A moment more, and Valentin fell, struck by a mortal wound.

Hardly had he sunk to the ground, when Marguerite, followed closely by Siebel, rushed in with a cry and knelt by his side.

"Oh, Valentin, forgive me! Live for me! I need you!" She wept piteously.

The dying man looked up and recognized her. His breath came thickly, but he summoned the last gasp to reproach her.

"Out of my sight!" he said sternly. "My curse upon you!"

And he fell back a corpse.

V

Faust was filled with horror at this deed, and remorse at his own conduct. To distract his mind from his despair, Mephistopheles conducted him to a mountain retreat where the witches were holding high carnival. It was Walpurgis Night, the one night in the year when lost souls were freed and might revisit the earth.

From the brink of a towering cliff Faust watched them fascinated, while the Demon chuckling pointed out famous personages of history one by one. "All mine!" his triumphant glances seemed to say. Faust beheld them with

terror which he could not express in words. He seemed to see as in a moment all the accumulated evil, the result of selfish passion, in the world.

"Look!" he cried at last, unable to endure the next vision which greeted him.

It was the image of Marguerite, rising slowly from the depths, but not the Marguerite he had first beheld spinning and singing at the cottage door. It was a haggard-faced woman with a child clutched at her breast. The child was dead, slain by her own hands, and around the mother's neck was a scarlet line, the mark of the headsman's axe.

"Mine!" the fiend chuckled again.

"No!" stormed Faust roused to action at last. "I must and will save her!"

And he dashed madly down the side of the mountain his companion following to see what he would do.

Together they entered the village, and made straight for the prison in which Marguerite lay. The vision was true. Her child was dead—they said, slain by her hand, though the poor mother was demented and knew not what she did. There she lay on a pallet of straw, doomed to die on the morrow but indifferent to her fate. She had tried to pray, but Heaven had seemed

closed to her. Waking or sleeping the face of the grinning Demon was ever with her.

By his magic arts Mephistopheles conducted Faust into the cell, unseen by any of the guards. Faust knelt down by the prostrate figure and gently called her name.

"Marguerite, it is I!" he murmured.

She stirred uneasily and looked up at him.

"How sweet the roses smell tonight!" she muttered. "See, the moon is just rising over the treetops. Ah, my beloved, it is sweet to wander forth with you!"

Her mind was harking back to the scenes of their first meetings.

"Marguerite!" he implored, clasping her hands.

"The jewels!" she said, clutching at her neck. "See how they sparkle as the moonlight strikes them! But they are as nothing to me, to the knowledge that you truly love me."

"Marguerite!" he cried again. "I do love you! I would give my whole life to expiate this crime. Fly with me! I have come to rescue you. See, the door is open, and by morning we will be far away in the hills."

Aided by him she half raised herself to a sitting posture, and then for the first time beheld his companion.

"The Evil One!" she cried. "No, I will not

go with you! As long as he is by your side nothing but evil can come of our love. Away, away! I will cry to Heaven for aid!"

She knelt and tried to pray, but again the fiend interposed.

"Silly woman!" he said, "your soul belongs to me, even as his. Come, however, we will save you from the executioner's axe."

"No!" she said wildly. "He can only harm my body, but you would damn my soul forever."

Again she tried to kneel in prayer, and despite the efforts of the fiend, she lifted her voice and besought the Heavenly Father for his mercy. With this last prayer upon her lips, her face relaxed its tense expression into a smile, and she sank lifeless upon the floor.

"Marguerite!" Faust cried in agony, realizing that she was lost to him forever.

Mephistopheles, too, uttered a cry but it was one of triumph. He advanced to the lifeless body like some bird of prey, but was halted in his tracks by a burst of celestial music. It was a band of angels singing the Easter hymn, "Christ is Risen!"

The walls of the cell parted, flooding its gloomy interior with heavenly light. The angels themselves appeared floating downward in the rays. Tenderly they lifted the form of Marguerite and bore her upward to the Mercy Seat.

Her prayers had been heard; her soul was redeemed.

With a snarl of rage the defeated Demon shrank back; but his hand still clutched firmly the arm of Faust, the deluded mortal who had wagered his soul for earthly happiness—and had lost!

FIDELIO

I

"FOR the thousandth time I ask you, Marcellina, will you marry me?"

"And for the thousandth time I answer, No, No, No!"

So saying, the pretty girl addressed as Marcellina stamped her foot, tossed her head, and snapped her fingers in her sweetheart's face. In short, she acted as if she really meant it.

Poor Jacquino, the other party to this courtship, acted somewhat flustered, as well he might; but there was something about his attitude which said plainer than words, that he intended to ask this scornful beauty for the thousand and first time.

The scene of this love-making of long ago (it was back in the eighteenth century) was not very prepossessing. It was a prison yard belonging to a Spanish castle. Marcellina was the jailer's daughter, and Jacquino the turnkey. Naturally he felt that they were kindred souls; but the girl thought otherwise. What made it still more provoking was that, in times past, she had smiled upon him; then her favor had sud-

denly veered away in favor of the jailer's new assistant, a handsome youth named Fidelio.

Marcellina did not know much about Fidelio, and the latter seemed to shun her, but this very aloofness coupled with a pensive look in the youth's eyes made Marcellina's heart go pit-a-pat every time he drew near. For the same reason it made the honest turnkey's teeth gnash together with rage.

Had Jacquino only known it, he had little to fear from this quarter. Fidelio, instead of being a young man, was in reality a beautiful and highborn woman who had donned this disguise in order to gain admittance to the prison. Here her beloved husband, Florestan, was shut up with other political prisoners, by the wicked governor, Pizarro, and it was believed that he was being slowly starved to death in one of the dungeons far down under the castle walls.

Leonora (for that was Fidelio's real name) was embarrassed by the open devotion of Marcellina, but at the same time she did not discourage it, as it gave her still freer access to the prison cells. Rocco, the jailer, had also taken a great fancy to this handsome and evidently highborn stranger, and without asking too many questions gave him a responsible position in the management of the prison. When he observed the growing fondness of his daughter for "Fi-

delio," he hinted that such a marriage would not be distasteful to him. But we can well believe that this placed poor Leonora in a still more embarrassing situation.

Still she temporized, hoping each day that she would find her husband in one of the cells as yet unexplored. She had heard that he was already dead, but she refused to give up hope until the entire prison was searched.

Pizarro, the governor, had been such a tyrant that at last a party of nobles had risen to protest against his rule. Florestan was a leader in this revolt, and it was for this action that the governor had thrown him into prison. It was Pizarro's fell purpose to prevent him from ever again seeing the light of day. While he did not dare execute him openly, his orders to Rocco were to deprive him of food. It could be stated then that he had died of disease.

But before this wicked plot could be carried out, word was received that Don Fernando, the prime minister of all Spain, was making a tour of inspection of the prisons. When Pizarro heard this he was in a tremble. It would never do to have his political prisoners discovered. They must be put out of the way at once. He dispatched an order to Rocco, which Leonora herself brought back with her from one of her visits to the city.

"Rocco," she said, wistfully, as she handed him this with other documents, "have I not served you well thus far?"

"You have indeed, Fidelio," he replied giving the supposed youth a clap on the back.

"Then I want you to trust me further. Let me have the keys to all the prison. I have not visited that lower tier of cells yet."

"That is no sight for your young eyes," replied the jailer not unkindly. "Why, there we keep our worst offenders. And some of those poor wretches are not long for this world. One of 'em is on the governor's black books now—only he doesn't seem to die fast enough."

Leonora shuddered. A cold chill of fear swept over her from head to foot, but she struggled to retain her self-possession.

Meanwhile, Pizzarro himself came to the prison to see that his last commands were carried out. He told Rocco that "the man in the lowest dungeon" must be killed at once, if he were not already dead, and placed in his grave before Don Fernando arrived.

"I cannot do the bloody deed," answered Rocco, who was not bad at heart.

"Come, come," temporized the governor tossing over a purse of gold. "One prisoner more or less oughn't to sit heavy on your consience."

"I tell you, I cannot strike the blow," said

Rocco stubbornly. "But"—eyeing the gold—"I can dig the grave if you yourself will deal the stroke."

With this Pizarro was fain to be content, and each went his separate way.

Poor Leonora had heard enough to place her in an agony of fear. No sooner had the cruel governor gone than she came again to the jailer and begged leave to accompany him upon his rounds.

"I have already told you," he answered, "that those lower dungeons are no place for you, and besides it is the governor's orders that none but myself go down here. But"—hesitating—"just now I've got an ugly job to do, and belike you can help me."

"What is that?" she asked trembling.

"I've got orders to dig a grave for that poor fellow down in the bottom hole. Come along and help me. I reckon the governor won't object to that."

"Will not—later in the day—do for the grave digging?" asked Leonora, striving to gain time. "See, the sun is shining brightly, and it would be a fine time to give the poor prisoners an airing."

As she said this, she looked beseechingly at Marcellina, and the latter eager to gain favor with "Fidelio" added her entreaties that the cells be unlocked for a little while.

The jailer hesitated then consented, and amid much clinking of chains and drawing of bolts the upper tier of cells was opened, and the poor inmates let out. How keen was their joy at this view of the sun and whiff of fresh air! They danced, capered, and stretched out their arms.

But among them Leonora did not see the loved face that she wished to behold.

The prisoners' brief reprieve was all too short. Unluckily the governor returned in time to see his victims enjoying this taste of the out-of-doors. Angrily he upbraided Rocco for letting them out, and ordered that they be locked up again at once.

"Have patience," calmly retorted the old jailer. "It is the King's birthday, and I was giving the prisoners a chance to celebrate it. Besides, I thought it would look well, in case the minister arrived, to see them well cared for."

"Have done with thy prating," stormed the governor. "Is the grave yet dug?"

"No, but it soon will be—only I am an old man and need help. With your permission I will take my assistant here—"

"Go—both of ye—and make no more words about it," said the impatient governor.

Sighing deeply, Leonora picked up the digging tools and departed with the jailer.

II

The dungeon which they finally entered, far below the level of the courtyard, was chill, damp and gloomy. Only a feeble ray of light filtered down from a small window far up the wall.

As Leonora's eyes slowly became accustomed to the darkness, she made out the form of the prisoner lying upon a wretched pallet in the corner. He lay so still that she could not tell whether he was alive or dead; and she vainly sought to discern his features.

"Come," said the jailer impatiently. "We must set to work at once. Help me to lift this stone which covers an old well. We will then not have to dig so much."

He was already tugging away with pickaxe and crowbar at the stone, which lay in the far corner of the dungeon. Leonora could not linger by the side of the prisoner, but came reluctantly to help the old man. They had partially rolled the stone away, when a deep groan came from the other corner.

"Oh, the poor fellow!" exclaimed Leonora laying down her tools. "See, I have brought a bit of bread with me. Let me give it to him; he is dying!"

" 'Gainst the governor's orders," grumbled

Rocco; "but I was never a man to stand by and see another man suffer."

And he actually handed her his flask of wine also.

Overjoyed she ran and knelt by the side of the couch. She lifted the sufferer's head in her arm, while she pressed food and drink between his lips.

"Ah, gentle youth!" at length murmured the victim in weak, hoarse tones, "may Heaven reward thee for thy mercy!"

Leonora strained her eyes and ears to see if he were indeed her dear husband, but was still unable to recognize him, because of his changed voice and the darkness.

Again the jailer summoned her to her unwelcome task. But hardly had they begun anew upon the grave when the door opened admitting Pizarro. He feared lest the minister of state should arrive at any moment, and he had come to make short shrift of his victim. But like all tyrants he wished to enjoy a moment of triumph and revenge, before striking the blow.

"Now, thou dog!" he said, striding over to the couch, "prepare to die. It is I, Pizarro, who speaks—the man whom thou did'st think to defy."

He had expected to find his victim so weak that he would grovel on the floor and beg for

mercy—a spectacle that would have been vastly pleasing. But what was his amazement to have the prisoner rise to his feet—thanks to the bread and wine—and give him look for look.

"It is what I might expect from such a murderer as thou," retorted the prisoner.

Uttering a cry of suppressed rage at this defiance, Pizarro drew his dagger and prepared to strike.

But another cry more shrill came from behind him. Leonora had at last recognized Florestan! Quickly springing forward she shielded the body of her husband with her outstretched arms.

"Thou shalt not kill him!" she cried; "unless thou dost first slay his wife!"

The governor drew back in amazement while Rocco and Florestan exclaimed in surprise. Florestan held to his feet with difficulty, but embraced his wife tenderly. What mattered it now, if he must die? He was reunited to her whom he had loved tenderly, and whom he had often fancied he saw in his feverish dreams.

Pizarro, however, was not to be daunted by this new turn of events. Brandishing his weapon he again sprang forward.

"Wife, or no wife, he shall die!" he cried. "Stand aside, or ye shall both bear the brunt of my anger!"

But Leonora was not the weak woman he supposed. Suddenly turning upon him, she reached quickly within the folds of her tunic and the next instant he found himself looking into the barrel of a pistol.

"Another step forward and I fire," she announced calmly.

The cold blue of her eyes as she said this had as much effect upon Pizarro, who was a coward at heart, as did the sight of the weapon. He retreated toward the door.

What would have been the outcome to the brave Leonora and to Florestan, it would not be hard to guess, as the governor's men held the castle; but just then a flourish of trumpets outside told of another important arrival.

"The Minister! the Minister!" voices were heard announcing.

Pizarro dared not delay another instant. It was his duty to welcome the arriving dignitary. With a gesture of impotent rage he turned on his heel and left the cell.

The rest is soon told. Up to the brilliantly lighted courtyard, in sharp contrast to the gloomy dungeon, Rocco conducted Florestan and his brave wife. The jailer was nothing loath to aid them and defy the governor, as Pizarro's cruelties had long since sickened him.

While Pizarro cringed and slunk back, Florestan came unsteadily forward.

"Justice, good Don Fernando!" he cried, holding up his manacled hands." "Justice!"

"Who is it asks for justice?" asked the Prime Minister. Then as he looked more closely, "Can it be my old comrade, Don Florestan? How came you in this plight?"

Then Florestan told of the governor's misdeeds, and of how some of his friends with him had willingly suffered death for standing against the tyrant.

"But for my noble wife here," he ended, "we would all doubtless be in our graves."

When the Count heard all the story, he gave orders that the other cells be opened at once.

"And you, brave lady," he said to Leonora, "shall have the privilege of striking off your husband's shackles."

Then, indeed, was a time of general rejoicing for all save one—the disgraced Pizarro—who was never again permitted to misrule. The released prisoners shared the joy. The jailer, though still bewildered over the fact that his assistant had befooled him, was content with the turn of affairs. Jacquino was openly joyous that his hated rival had been cleared out of his pathway so neatly. He looked at Marcellina, who had been taking it all in, in a dazed sort of way.

Perhaps Jacquino would make a better husband than Fidelio, after all!

Jacquino sidled up to her and took her hand.

"For the thousand and first time I ask you, Marcellina," he said in a low tone.

And "Fidelio" in the refuge of her husband's arms smiled her blessings upon the pair.

LOHENGRIN, THE SWAN KNIGHT

I

"HEAR ye! hear ye! The King has come to Antwerp! Who fights upon the King's side?"

The silvery blast of a trumpet rang out, following the clear tones of a herald's voice; and in answer a great shout arose from a multitude of throats, for all the people in this wide stretching plain were eager to follow the standard of their warlike ruler.

It was in the days not long after Parsifal had come to the Temple of the Grail. The kingdom of Germany, so long a prey to warring states, had found a strong head in Henry the Fowler who protected the land from foes within and without. In times of peace it was his custom to travel from city to city holding court and listening to the grievance of every one, great or small. In war time, he levied troops and led them in person. His visit to Antwerp, on this occasion, was for both purposes, as the Hungarians had lately declared war against him and were threatening to invade Germany.

Antwerp was capital of the ancient dukedom of Brabant, and one of King Henry's chief

cities. On his coming, therefore, he was greatly troubled to find the state rent with quarrels and secret discontent.

The King held his court in the open air, under the spreading branches of a stately tree, called the "Oak of Justice," which stood on the bank of the winding river Scheldt. Here all the people gathered to pay him homage, and here—on the bright spring morning when our story opens—he caused the herald in brilliant livery to stand forth and blow upon a trumpet.

"Hear ye!" cried the herald again. "The King has come! Who fights for the King?"

Then all the people answered as with one voice, and came and knelt before the throne in token of allegiance.

The King's eye gladdened at the sight. "Verily," he said, "with such stout arms and loving hearts as these, we will drive the enemy into the sea!"

After he had greeted many by name, and many others had been presented to him, he saw one noble who had fought with him against the Danes.

"Come hither, Frederick of Telramund," he commanded. "As an oft-tried friend, I have a question to ask of you. How is it that Brabant has no head, but is rent with inner quarrels?"

Frederick of Telramund stepped forward and

bowed low. He was a tall man, with beetling brows and deep, piercing eyes.

"I am thankful, my king," he began in a heavy voice and with ill-concealed excitement, "that you have seen our troubles and will lend ear to the story of them. I will tell you the truth. The former Duke of Brabant was my friend, and when he died he chose me as guardian for his children, Godfrey and Elsa. I brought them up as carefully as though they were my own, and looked forward fondly to the time when Godfrey should be duke; also—shall I confess it?—when I might win Elsa for my wife. But all these hopes were destined to fail. Elsa was a proud girl, and I fear now that she coveted the dukedom for herself, though she pretended to have great love for her brother.

"One day they went roaming in the woods and by the river's brink, as they often did. When night came, Elsa returned without her brother. She was pale and trembling, and when we asked her where he had gone, she would only reply by wringing her hands and sobbing. That is all the answer we have got from her, from that day to this, and we cannot help fearing that she drowned him, or laid other violent hands upon him.

"Of course, after this happening, I could no longer choose her hand in marriage. But I

chose instead a lady whom I now wish to present to you—Ortrud, daughter of the brave King Radbod. In former times he was king over all this land; and in my wife's name I lay claim to Brabant."

As he finished speaking, Frederick took his wife by the hand and led her forward. She was a very handsome woman, though almost of masculine type, and her eye had a watchful look like that of a crouching tigress. She bent her head with the grace of a queen.

The King knitted his brow at the story, and looked about as though seeking some one else whom he might question. Seeing his doubt, Frederick resolved upon a bold stroke. Turning he addressed the people in a loud voice, saying,

"I accuse Elsa of Brabant of the murder of her brother. If there be any here who can deny my charge, I challenge him to come forth!"

No one moved, although there were mutterings here and there and sullen shakings of the head.

The King rose suddenly and hung his shield upon a limb of the tree.

"This is the Oak of Justice!" he said, "and I promise ye that I will not depart from its shade this day, until I have made trial of this charge.

This shield no longer shall I wear
Till judgment is pronounced, I swear.

At a signal, the herald came forward again and announced, "Now shall this cause be tried as ancient law demands!" Then he blew a loud blast upon his trumpet and called upon Elsa of Brabant to come before her King for judgment.

The people had received the announcement that the King would try the cause with breathless eagerness. Now they parted to right and left and looked intently along the path Elsa was expected to come. They were not disappointed. After a few moments a train of ladies appeared walking slowly, two by two, toward the Oak of Justice. Among them was one dressed in pure white. Her head was uncovered, and her golden hair fell in soft curls about her shoulders. Her blue eyes had a far-away look in them, and her pale face was marked by lines that told of suffering. The Lady Ortrud looked balefully at her as she came forward, but the people drew nearer to the maiden with marks of pity that showed their old love for her.

The King himself was struck by this fair vision. The set look came out of his eyes, and he leaned forward and gently took her by the hand.

"Are you Elsa of Brabant?" he asked.

The young girl bowed and wrung her hands in silence.

"You are accused of the murder of your

brother," continued the King. "What have you to say?"

"Oh, my poor brother!" cried Elsa; and not another word would she answer to the charge.

"Speak!" said the King. "Do you not know that I must adjudge you guilty unless you confide in me?"

Elsa looked up at the King and seemed to gain courage. The people gazed on the scene with stillness as of death. Elsa's voice was low but clear, and its tones were distinctly heard.

"When I have been in deep trouble," she said, "I have prayed to heaven for help. It has been many times of late—O, many, many times! At last I was answered. I have had a dream, and it is such a beautiful dream that I know it must come true. A knight in glittering armor appeared in a vision and promised to be my champion whenever I should call upon him. O King, I claim him for my champion to-day! *He* will prove my innocence!"

Her words answered nothing and proved nothing; yet such was her manner that the people believed in her and shouted aloud that she was guiltless. The King himself seemed to seek a pretext to let her go free; but Frederick of Telramund stepped boldly forward.

"A likely story this, your Majesty!" he sneered. "Dream knights never yet have done

anything; and if the Lady Elsa can but find her champion upon earth, here I stand ready to fight him to decide this cause."

The King looked at the maiden anxiously, and her face lit up at once.

"I agree to these terms," she said.

Upon this the King gave orders that lists, or open spaces, should be cleared; and then he announced that, following ancient custom, they would rest the issue of Elsa's guilt or innocence upon single combat between champions. The herald once again came forward and blew a long blast upon his trumpet, and proclaimed,

> Let him stand forth by heaven's right
> Who would for Elsa's just cause fight!

There was a painful silence, while Frederick and Ortrud looked in smiling disdain upon the poor girl.

"O my King!" she cried. "Summon him again! His home is far away and he may not have heard!"

"Sound once again!" commanded the King, and again the trumpet call rang out.

Again there was intense silence. Elsa dropped upon her knees and prayed until it seemed as though her very soul would burst with emotion. Suddenly a man nearest the bank of the river startled the silence with a cry,

"A swan! a swan! And in its wake a boat bearing a knight!"

Every eye turned and gazed up the winding stream, and there, sure enough, was a beautiful white bird swimming easily and gracefully along and drawing a little boat with a knight in it.

"A miracle! a miracle!" shouted the people.

As he drew near, they saw that the knight was clad in silver armor which shone dazzling white in the sun. Amid a general hush, the swan drew the boat to shore, and the knight stepped out. Before greeting the King or court, he dismissed the swan in a tender little song of farewell:

I give thee thanks, my faithful swan,
Turn thee again and stem the tide;
Back to that wondrous land of dawn
Where thou and I did once abide.
Full well thy loving task is done,
Farewell, farewell, beloved swan!
My faithful swan!

The swan bent its head in sad obedience and sailed away on the current, and quietly the knight turned to the Monarch.

"Hail, O King!" he said courteously. "I have come in answer to your summons to do battle in Elsa's cause."

"You are right welcome, noble knight, from wheresoever you come," answered the King. Then turning to Elsa, he continued, "Do you accept this knight to be your champion?"

He was compelled to yield

"'Tis the knight of my dream!" she murmured, sinking at his feet.

The King struck his shield three times with his sword.

"Sound the call to combat!" he commanded.

The call was given, and Frederick of Telramund took his place sullenly in the lists. He liked not the turn affairs were taking, but his word was given and could not be withdrawn.

The stranger knight lifted Elsa gently to her feet, then prepared to face his enemy. Another stroke upon the King's shield, and the two antagonists had crossed blades with a sharp crash.

But not long did they fight. Frederick was clearly outclassed from the first; and after a few wild, furious blows, which the other lightly parried, his sword was sent flying from his hand, and he was compelled to yield to the mercy of his conqueror.

The Knight of the Swan refused to take his life; but according to the law the defeated man was accounted a perjurer and doomed to exile. With downcast head he slunk away, followed by the proud Ortrud, who glared about defiantly to the last.

But the victorious knight now heeded them not. He had turned to where Elsa stood, and held out his hands in the old gesture which every

maiden must one day understand. With a glad cry she ran and nestled in his arms.

"My hero!" she whispered.

Then the knight turned proudly toward the King, and said in the hearing of all,

"I would have the Lady Elsa as my wife."

"You have my consent with hers," replied King Henry, heartily. "And with her hand goes the dukedom of Brabant."

At this all the people shouted and threw their caps high in the air; for the new duke presented a handsome figure, while they had never liked the usurping Frederick.

"Only one promise must I exact from the fair Elsa," continued the champion. "If she cannot give it, I must release her from her silent pledge."

"What is that?" asked the King.

"She must never ask me my name, nor whence I come. That I am well born and worthy of her she can decide for herself. But no question must be asked as to my past life. Can you promise this, my Elsa?"

He looked down anxiously at her, and she met his gaze frankly and trustingly.

"I promise—my husband!" she answered in low sweet tones.

The Knight of the Swan kissed her upon the

brow, while the King himself came forward and took each by the hand.

"I shall take this maiden in my charge," said Henry the Fowler, "and remain in Antwerp long enough to bestow her in marriage upon this man. Come, let us go to the palace and prepare for the ringing of the joy bells!"

Then once again the people shouted with delight, and came crowding up to share in the scene. The King's shield was seized from the limb were it hung, and Elsa was placed upon it and borne forth in triumph, while the Swan Knight was likewise carried upon his own shield.

II

To have heard the noise and rejoicing, you would have thought that there was no one in all Brabant who did not share in the general happiness. But there were two who found it gall and wormwood, and these were Frederick and Ortrud. Deprived of their wealth and power, and in danger of their lives, they suffered a just punishment for their wickedness. Frederick was for leaving Brabant at once, and seeking their fortunes in other countries. But Ortrud, whose spirit remained unbroken, would not hear to this. All along she had been his evil counselor, and now she set going other schemes of mischief.

The two stole forth at nightfall, clothed in

beggar's tattered garments, and made their way to the palace steps, where they listened to the sounds of rejoicing within the palace.

"Ah! I should still be there, if I had not listened to you," groaned Frederick, who was a man of poor courage.

"Cease your complaining!" answered Ortrud. "We will win the victory yet, and you shall be in power again, if you listen to me now."

"What can we do?"

"Have you not heard of the promise made by Elsa to this Swan Knight? He is a magician, I warrant you, and all we need do is to prove it. She has promised never to ask his name. Now if we can get her to break that promise, he will vanish—mark my words!"

Frederick sat up and looked around eagerly.

"Ortrud, you are a genius!" he said. "But how can we do this? We are beggared and exiled."

"Trust me—but hush! I hear some one on the balcony!"

It was Elsa herself, who came out for a moment to look at the stars and commune with her own great happiness. At sight of the girl's face in the glow of the window, Ortrud crept softly round the balustrade and suddenly appeared before her startled gaze.

"Pardon—pardon!" cried the crafty woman

in a low tone, and sinking on the step at Elsa's feet.

"Who are you?" demanded Elsa.

"I am an outcast. Out of your great happiness pity my deep misery!"

"It is Ortrud!" exclaimed the girl, her heart made tender by her own love. "Poor woman, I did not seek to harm you. Your husband brought it on himself."

"I had naught to say," coaxed the kneeling woman. "And now you would not send me forth from your door, to wander into the wide world a beggar!"

"No!" exclaimed the generous Elsa, "I will shelter and protect you. Come with me!"

She turned to order lights from two servants at the door; and Ortrud shot a quick glance of cunning triumph at her hidden husband, before entering the palace.

All that night Frederick lurked amid the shadows of the neighboring cathedral and waited. He knew that their wicked schemes were in safe hands, with Ortrud on the inside; and although only a few short hours remained he took heart of hope.

The wedding had been set for early the next morning, so that Henry the Fowler could go to the wars.

Hardly had the sun struck the lowest range

of windows on the building, before an army of servants appeared, as if by magic, and began decorating walls, porticos and pillars with streamers and flowers. When the sunlight had penetrated every corner of the court a herald came out and announced the approaching wedding. The King's business demanded haste and so there had been no delay. The herald further announced that the stranger knight would not accept the dukedom, but would be styled simply the Protector of Brabant; and that he was to go with the King's troops and lead the men into battle against the Hungarians.

The herald had scarcely ceased ere four pages appeared on the palace steps crying, "Make way for the Lady Elsa!"

Again the ladies-in-waiting came forth, clad in white, and behind them came Elsa looking very lovely in her bridal robes and attended by her friends and some of the noblest ladies of the state. Near her walked Ortrud whom Elsa wished to honor, and who was attired in rich and costly robes.

Slowly the wedding party filed across the palace courtyard to the wide-open doors of the great cathedral. The maids arrayed themselves on either side to let their mistress pass; but just as Elsa reached the portal, Ortrud suddenly rushed in front of her exclaiming,

"No! you shall not enter first! I am higher born than you, and must take the lead!"

"What do you mean?" asked Elsa starting back.

"I mean that your nameless knight won his victory yesterday by fraud, and that I am still the rightful duchess of Brabant."

Elsa flushed red and answered her proudly, "A fitting return is this for my late kindness to you! And as to the victory it was won fairly in sight of all the people. Stand aside, rash woman, and let me pass!"

Ortrud stood unmoved. "You would wed a pretty champion!" she sneered. "Why, you do not know even his name! And as for knowing his origin or character—forsooth!" (Here she snapped her fingers). "I tell you he is a magician, and won his fight with my husband by the powers of evil!"

"It is false!" cried Elsa wildly. "You are a slanderous——"

"The King! the King!" shouted the attendants at this moment. "Make way for the King."

The quarrel at the doorway ceased as the King approached followed by his knights. At his right hand came the Knight of the Swan, who seeing the commotion stepped quickly forward to Elsa's side.

"What is the trouble, beloved?" he asked quietly.

"This dreadful woman!" exclaimed the girl pointing to Ortrud. "She will not let me pass, and she has been saying wicked things about you."

The knight gave Ortrud one stern look, before which even her vengeful spirit quailed.

"Stand aside!" he commanded in a low voice.

"What is wrong?" demanded the voice of the King, who had come up with the group.

"Nothing now, your Majesty. We will go forward," answered the Swan Knight, taking his trembling bride upon his arm and mounting the cathedral steps.

But at the threshold they met another interference. Frederick of Telramund, who had been lurking about watching all that happened, suddenly stepped from behind the door shouting,

"Stay a moment, Elsa of Brabant. You are being deceived, foolish girl! You do not know whom you are marrying. He is a sorcerer and overcame me by magic! I demand at least the satisfaction of knowing his name."

Elsa was like to swoon away at this unlooked-for happening. But the stranger knight whispered tenderly to her and reassured her. Then turning to all he said again:

"I cannot reveal my name, but I leave my fate in the hands of my bride-to-be."

For answer she placed her hand trustingly in his.

The King, on his part, was thoroughly aroused by this second interruption.

"Begone, sirrah!" he exclaimed. "The fight was fair and the champion sent of heaven. Come not into our presence again on peril of your life!"

Without further hindrance the wedding party entered the church; and while the great organ pealed its strain of joyful music the knight and his lady were blessed and pronounced man and wife.

III

All that day the festivities lasted. The King had commanded that a feast be spread for every man, woman and child in the city. The new Protector of Brabant was publicly acclaimed in the afternoon; while, that evening, a state banquet was held in the palace.

Then following an old custom the maidens went ahead of the newly wedded couple to conduct them to the bridal-chamber. And as they entered its door they sang a beautiful refrain that has greeted the ears of countless brides from that day to this:

Fairest and best,
We lead thee on!

There the maidens left them and went away singing as they had come. When the last sweet note had died away, the knight took his wife's two hands tenderly within his own.

"Elsa," he murmured, "do you indeed love me; or have you wed me only from a sense of duty?"

"I have loved you ever since I beheld you in my dreams," she answered. "But how came you to seek me out?"

"I am indeed heaven-sent, as I told you. Even without your peril, I think that Love would have guided me to you. For I love you dearly, Elsa!"

"Ah, how sweet my name sounds upon your lips!" she cried softly. "If I could but utter your own, my happiness would be full."

The knight gazed at her in silence a moment, then led her to an open casement.

"Breathe all the fragrance of eventide," he said. "Do you not distinguish many sweet odors beside the dew-laden roses near you? The breeze comes soft across the meadow and sea, bringing strange memories and hints of foreign shores. Is it not all the more delightful because we cannot penetrate all these mysteries? Love itself is the greatest mystery of all. Let us love

then and be happy in each succeeding day; for when they are past we cannot recall them. We can only remember, but the mystery is gone!"

"Yes, let us love and be happy," she answered doubtfully. "But, O my husband, what shall I say when evil remarks are made, as those by that wicked woman to-day?"

"Still thinking of her?" he replied with an attempt at lightness. "She will not annoy you again. For the rest, can you not trust me?"

"Can you not trust *me?*" she insisted. "Am I not your wife and worthy of some degree of confidence?"

"Elsa, once for all, this must not be! You have given your word to respect my secret. I assure you, it is not a dark secret, and that I may look you frankly and joyfully in the face, as my wife. Isn't that enough?"

"But Frederick and Ortrud? What do they know about you? Why did they—oh, I cannot get their words out of my mind!"

Elsa was, in fact, growing hysterical. She clung to him wildly as they stood in the window. Poor girl! her recent trials had left her an easy prey to the insidious attack of this day.

The knight was very patient with her. He realized her unstrung condition, and tried to divert her mind by placing her gently in a chair where she could look out upon the river.

"See how white the waters gleam in the moonlight!" he said. "The river seems like a silver ribbon stretching away."

"And look!" she cried pointing. "There comes the swan-boat to take you from me! Ah, do not go!"

"Calm yourself, dear one! There is no boat."

"Oh, I cannot bear this mystery! I must question you!"

"Elsa!"

"I must, I must! What is your name?"

"Alas!" he exclaimed. "Beware of what you say! Not another word, I implore you!"

"Whence do you come?" she continued wildly.

At this moment a slight noise was heard at the door, and Frederick of Telramund burst in. He had enlisted the services of four of his former party, resolved to make one last bold stroke and kill the Knight of the Swan. But again he was no match for the knight. Alarmed by the noise, the latter sprang quickly for his sword and met Frederick midway in the room. A few swift strokes and that evil man lay dead upon the floor. The four nobles were seized with fear and came and knelt before the knight craving pardon.

"Bear him to the King," he said quietly pointing to his fallen foe. "An audience will be held at early sunrise under the Oak of Justice."

The men bowed humbly and went away with their burden.

Elsa had well-nigh fainted from the excitement, and now laid her head sobbing upon the knight's shoulder.

"Forgive me!" she cried. "I recall my thoughtless words."

For answer he kissed her lingeringly on the brow and then struck a gong which summoned her attendants.

"I leave the Lady Elsa in your hands," he said. "Array her as befits a bride, at the rising of the sun, and conduct her to the King. There I will answer all she asks."

The wondering maids hastened to Elsa's side. She held out her hands to the knight beseechingly, but he passed from the room in silence and with bowed head.

IV

The next morning early the King held Court again beneath the Oak of Justice. This was the day he was to start for the wars, and many knights and soldiers had assembled to march with their leader, the new Protector of Brabant. Henry had just come, and was answering the greetings of his captains, when the four nobles appeared bearing the body of Frederick of

Telramund upon his shield, and followed by the weeping Ortrud.

In answer to the King's question as to the meaning of this, they replied that the Knight of the Swan would soon appear and explain everything. They had hardly finished speaking when Elsa and her maids came in view. Elsa was attired, as yesterday, in her bridal dress, but her face was woebegone, her hair disheveled and her eyes red with weeping. So pitiable was her appearance that the crowd near her broke into exclamations of pity, while the King rising hastily came forward and led her to a seat.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he demanded. "By heaven, I will know the truth!"

"Your Majesty, the Knight of the Swan will soon appear and answer all questions," said one of the maids.

The King was about to make a quick remark, when the knight himself entered the throng. The men who expected to follow him into battle greeted him with cheers, but he made no response beyond a sad smile and shake of the head. He wore the same glittering armor of his first appearance, but his head was slightly bent as if in thought, and his steps were slow and reluctant.

The hot-blooded King could no longer restrain himself.

"I would know the meaning of these things!" he said, scarcely responding to the Swan Knight's silent greeting. He pointed to the body of Frederick. "Who has done this deed?"

"I slew him in self-defense," answered the knight. Then he told of the attack within his room and took the four nobles to witness that he told the truth. "With your Majesty's permission I will leave the verdict to all the people," he ended.

Thus appealed to, the people cried loudly that he was innocent of wrong, and that heaven had sent him to rid the land of a usurper and a coward.

"I also deem that you have done justly," said the King. "But what means the sorrow of this lady whom I took under my especial protection? Answer, and carefully!"

"I have promised the Lady Elsa to answer her questions, and I shall likewise answer yours," replied the knight, courteously. "The fighting men of Brabant—stout hearts and true—have gathered here to-day expecting that I shall lead them to the wars. This cannot be. I must tell my story and then bid farewell to all."

A general murmur of dissent arose at this, but the knight stood unmoved waiting for silence. Presently as a hush fell, he began to speak again, slowly and earnestly.

"In a far-away land," he said, "there stands a sacred hill called Mount Salvat. Upon this hill rise the walls and towers of a mystic castle, called the Temple of the Grail, for within it is preserved the most precious relic in all the world —the Holy Grail. The knights who guard this shrine are a close brotherhood who have renounced the world and given their lives to self-sacrifice and good deeds. In reward for this, the sacred Cup gives them power beyond that of other men. They may journey into distant lands to help the weak and relieve distress, and always will they be victorious. But if they disclose the secret of their power, they must return to Mount Salvat.

"Thus was I sent to become the Lady Elsa's champion; and I had fondly hoped to dwell among you and be worthy of her love and trust. But now this cannot be. Enemies have persuaded her that my name and rank must be revealed; so it only is left for me to tell my lineage. I am not ashamed of this. I am the son of Parsifal, chief Guardian of the Grail. My name is Lohengrin."

As he ceased speaking, amid the profound silence, voices were heard from the river's bank.

"The swan! the swan! See, he comes again!"

Elsa threw herself upon the ground in an agony of grief.

"Ah, do not go away!" she moaned, clasping the knight's feet. "Do not go away and leave me! I shall die!"

Lohengrin extended his finger sadly toward the bend in the stream, where the swan drew the boat majestically forward.

"It is the summons of heaven," he said. "I have no other choice. Farewell, beloved, forever!"

He raised her and she clung wildly to him as though she could not let him go. He gently resisted her.

"See!" he said. "Here is my sword and ring and bugle, which will bring victory in every battle-field. Keep them for your brother, of whom I give you good news. He is alive and may return in safety one day. I had hoped to bring him back to you within the year, if I had been permitted to remain."

"But you have failed, my fine hero!" cried a taunting voice which made them all turn quickly. It was Ortrud who had come forward for one last bitter triumph. "You have failed, so you and your pretty little bride may now hear the truth. It was *I* who caused her to ask those troublesome questions! And it was *I* who made away with her precious brother! I know one or two tricks of magic myself, and one of them

turned the boy—into yonder swan! Ha, ha, ha!"

She laughed harshly and pointed to the mystic bird now at the river brink, while King and courtiers looked on in amazed silence.

Lohengrin alone remained calm at her outburst. He sank upon his knees and, lifting his noble face so that the sunlight seemed to irradiate it with a glory, he prayed to heaven earnestly and silently for aid. Suddenly, down a beam of light a white dove fluttered. It was the dove of the Grail. Accepting this as a sign that his prayer was answered, Lohengrin unfastened the swan from the boat, when the bird vanished beneath the surface of the water, and in its stead rose a fair young knight. Lohengrin took his hand and led him forward.

"This is Godfrey, the rightful Duke of Brabant!" he said. "Behold your chief, who will lead you to victory!"

Godfrey knelt in homage to the King who raised him up and embraced him, while the people promised him their glad allegiance. Then Godfrey and Elsa rushed into each other's arms in the joy of reunion. Overcome with rage, Ortrud sank swooning across the steps of the throne. Meanwhile Lohengrin, seeing that Elsa was in the arms of her brother, entered the boat, whose chains were seized by the tiny dove. A

flutter of its wings, and lo! the boat moved easily out on the stream and went swiftly forward against the current.

When Elsa raised her eyes from her dear brother's face, she beheld the boat already far out upon the sunlit water. The knight stood leaning upon his shield, his whole figure shining, it seemed, with unearthly radiance, and alas! fading away like some splendid dream.

With a last despairing cry of "My husband! my husband!" Elsa sank prostrate upon the shore. Her dream it had been, and it was ended.

HANSEL AND GRETEL

I

BACK in the depths of a gloomy forest there once nestled a little cabin. It looked all the smaller in contrast to the great trees which towered overhead, and one could easily see that it must belong to very poor people. For a peep inside the door revealed only one room and furniture of the simplest.

This was the home of Peter, the broom-maker, and Gertrude his wife. Try as hard as they might, they could not sell enough brooms to make both ends meet, and their two children, Hansel and Gretel, were often hungry.

They were very hungry indeed on the evening when our story begins. Their father and mother had been gone all day to the neighboring town where there was a fair, and they had been given a lot of work to do, "to keep them out of mischief," as their sharp-tongued mother had said. Hansel was working away at some of his father's brooms, while Gretel was knitting stockings. But it had been a long day without anything to eat, and the children began to grow impatient. Wouldn't you be so too, if your stomach was empty?

Now Gretel was as hungry as her brother, but woman-like she tried to console him.

"It won't be long till suppertime, Hansel. Do stop complaining, and I'll tell you a secret. It's a fine one, too."

"What is it, Gret. I'll be good."

"Come over here and look in this jug. It's full of milk. A neighbor brought it in for us to-day, and I just know mother will cook us some rice in it, when she comes home."

"Hooray!" shouted Hansel. "I must see for myself what that precious jug has in it."

And he went over and tried to peek into the jug. Of course, he couldn't see anything. Next he shook it. It did *sound* like milk. He sniffed at it, but still was not satisfied. So what did the greedy boy finally do, but stick his finger down into it.

"Hansel! Aren't you ashamed of yourself!" scolded his sister. "I wouldn't have told you about the milk if I had known that you would act like that. Better get back to your work, or you'll catch it when mother comes home."

But Hansel only tossed his head defiantly and licked his finger.

"Yum, yum!" he said. "No more work for me to-day. I want to dance."

Gretel was fond of dancing too, and before she knew it she had seized her brother's out-

stretched hands and they were spinning around in a mad dance. But, after all, that was better for them than to think about being hungry. Gretel had picked up some new dance steps and she tried to teach them to Hansel. For once he learned them quickly, and away they went again, poor children, singing and dancing as though they hadn't a care in the world. At last in one mad whirl they lost their balance and fell in a heap on the floor, where they sprawled laughing so hard that they couldn't get up.

And at this moment unluckily the door opened and in walked their mother.

"What goings-on are these?" she scolded. "A nice way to behave when you have work to do. What do you mean by it, lazybones?"

"Why-ee—Hansel he wanted to dance," began Gretel timidly.

"Gretel, she was teaching me—" began Hansel in his turn.

"That will do for you both, good-for-nothings! Here your father and I are working our fingers to the bone for you, and the minute our backs are turned you begin to cut up."

The children again tried to make feeble excuses, but their angry mother would not listen. She seized a broomstick, the first thing handy, and made a dive at Hansel, who had prudently placed himself on the other side of the table

from her. She missed him, as he took good care that she should, but unluckily she hit the precious jug of milk. Over it went on the floor breaking into a hundred pieces, and away went their supper with it, in great splashes all over the cobblestone floor.

Then maybe she wasn't in a rage! She made no further attempt to strike the childern, but she grabbed a basket that hung on a peg and thrust it into the little girl's hands, while she still brandished her broomstick.

"Pack off with you!" she ordered. "Out of here this minute, both of you! You have made me lose our supper, so now you can hustle out and get another. Go and pick some strawberries. If the basket isn't full when you get back, you'll both get a trouncing. I mean what I say!"

And forthwith she bundled the frightened children out into the wood.

They had not gone out of her sight, however, before she began to regret her hasty action. She was not by nature of a mean disposition. She loved her children dearly, deep down in her heart, but her struggle with poverty day in and day out had driven the tenderness quite out of her. She wanted to call the children back, but her stubborn will interfered. Now as she thought of all her troubles and saw the milk

stains on the floor, she bent her head upon her arms, on the table, and sobbed herself to sleep.

Presently a merry song resounded through the wood. It was Peter, the broom-maker, coming home. Always of a happy-go-lucky disposition—and unlike his wife who worried over everything—he was in a specially happy mood to-night. And why shouldn't he be? He had sold all his brooms at the fair and had money in his pocket and food in his bag.

"Hi there, wife!" he called, bursting in at the door. "Why so quiet and solemn?"

Then seeing her asleep he laughed and went over and pinched her gently.

"Wake up, old girl!" he cried. "See what I've brought home. We'll have a royal supper. Where are the kiddies?"

And before her bewildered eyes he began to unpack things good to eat and place them on the table. There were fat loaves of bread and huge sausages, a ham, some butter, a dozen eggs, some sugar—oh my! I couldn't begin to tell you what a brave array it was for that poor little cabin. And the hungry children were now far away in the forest!

"Come, get busy, wife! What are you staring at?" he exclaimed.

"Where—where did all this come from?" she gasped.

"I had a streak of luck. Cleaned out all my stock—fancy prices, too! Oh, we'll fill up those children for once, bless their hearts! But where are they hiding?"

And Peter went to the door to call.

"No use calling them," said Gertrude uneasily. "They were idle and disobedient to-day, so I sent them out to pick berries."

"You sent them out into the forest?" cried Peter. "Why, it is growing dark, and don't you know that at Ilsenstein hard by there is a witch who makes away with children?"

"What witch?" she asked in alarm.

"The Crunch Witch! She lures children to her gingerbread house—and pops them into her magic oven and they turn into gingerbread boys and girls. Oh, oh, oh!"

And the poor man clasped both hands around his head and fairly groaned.

"Oh, what have I done!" exclaimed the mother, now thoroughly frightened. "We must go after them at once."

"Yes, we must lose no time," agreed Peter rousing himself to action.

So out they dashed into the dark wood, leaving their own supper untouched upon the table, and calling,

"Gretel! Hansel!"

But no answer came to them from the depths of the wood.

II

Out in the forest as the sunset rays fell slanting through the trees, making fantastic patterns upon the ground, the children wandered hand in hand.

To tell the truth, they had ceased being frightened. The charm of the woodland was upon them. The birds sang sweetly and the most delicious odors came wafting in on the breeze. It was all a part of the enchantment but the children did not know it, and they were quite happy.

They had nearly filled their basket with berries, and Gretel had begun to weave a wreath of wild flowers. They sat down to rest on a mossy bank at the foot of a tall tree. A cuckoo called to them from a tree near-by and they answered gaily.

"That is the bad bird that sucks other birds' eggs—just like this," said Hansel, and suiting the action to the word, he popped a big luscious berry into his mouth and gulped it down. It tasted so good that he placed one between his sister's lips. They laughed and began feeding each other. They twined the flower wreaths

around each other's head, and called themselves the King and Queen.

Oh, it was fine sport while it lasted, and between the flavor of the berries and the magic of the forest they forgot all about their waiting mother at home. It was only when they reached the bottom of the basket that Gretel sat up with a start.

"Oh, Hansel! What have we done?" she exclaimed. "We have eaten all the berries, and it is getting too dark to find more. What shall we do?"

"Well, we can't go home empty-handed," said Hansel, stoutly. "I'd rather stay in the woods all night, than get a beating."

"So would I," agreed Gretel, but she looked around her a little fearfully as she spoke.

The shadows began to deepen around them, and the two children drew closer together.

"What was that?" quavered Gretel, pointing. "I—I thought I saw something moving in the bushes."

"It was nothing." Hansel tried to put a brave note into his own shaking voice as he placed an arm around his sister.

"But I—I thought I heard somebody call."

It may have been their own distracted parents seeking them; but the boy only said:

"It was the echoes. The woods are full of echoes—but they don't hurt anyone."

"There!" cried Gretel. "Don't you see that light dancing among the trees?"

"It is the Will-o-the-wisp," he again assured her. "He won't hurt anybody either. I won't let him."

Gretel cowered against him.

"Look! There comes a shadowy old woman!" she sobbed. "Don't let her get me!"

A strange little figure was indeed advancing, but as it drew near, the children ceased to show further signs of fear. Instead, they half smiled. And the little man—for such it was—smiled back at them and chanted a quiet song. Then he reached back into a sack which was slung over his shoulders, and took out a pinch of sand which he sprinkled into their eyes. And they fell fast asleep.

But first they chanted a prayer, asking the fourteen angels, which guard little children, to be with them through the night.

Then a wonderful and beautiful thing happened to them. The sky overhead became rosy again, revealing a golden staircase reaching from the earth to the heavens. Down this staircase trooped the fourteen angels who took their stations at the heads and feet of the sleeping children. They waved golden wands and even

the birds grew mute as the whole wide forest slept in peace.

III

Once again the golden sun sent its shafts of light through the forest; and as the beams went hither and thither, the denizens of the wood awoke. The birds sang blithely, the squirrels scampered up and down the trees, and the little striped chipmunks chattered saucily.

The angels had gone back up the golden stairway which had vanished within the sunbeams, but now another pretty figure appeared. It was the Dew Fairy who carried the dew in the cups of bluebells. With these she sprinkled the eyes of the sleeping children.

"Awake, awake, ye sleeping ones!" she cried. "For see, it is broad day."

Then as they began to stir sleepily and looked about them, she became invisible.

"Wake up, Hansel!" said Gretel in her turn.

"Where are we?" he asked looking about him. "Oh, I remember now. But I had a fine dream. It was that the fourteen angels were standing right here all night, waving golden wands."

"I dreamed about them too," said Gretel. "Wasn't it fine?"

"Look there!" called Hansel suddenly, pointing through the trees.

A house stood revealed in the morning light—

a perfectly marvellous house! It glittered and sparkled in the morning sun, and a fine fragrance came from it. The children sniffed eagerly and drew near. The walls were made of loaf sugar. The roof was chocolate cake. Raisins ornamented the gables. And all around the house ran a gingerbread fence, with the queerest little posts imaginable. They looked like gingerbread children. On one side of the house was a cage with open bars, such as they have at menageries; and on the other side was a huge brick oven.

It was just as well for the children's peace of mind that they did not know what the cage and oven were for; but if they had known, it would have perhaps saved them from a terrible danger. For this was the enchanted house of the Witch of Ilsenstein, which she used to entrap children like Hansel and Gretel. Many a child had been lured by her and had never been heard of again!

But Hansel and Gretel did not know of this danger. Just now they were very hungry, and the sight and smell of the gingerbread and cake attracted them mightily.

"Oh, Hansel, look!" cried the girl. "I believe it is really good to eat!

> The walls are glistening sugar white,
> The roof a cake of rare delight
> With raisins thickly overspread;
> And see—the fence is gingerbread!

"Oh my!" shouted Hansel. "Did you ever see anything so wonderful?"

"No, I never did. And how good it smells!"

Little by little the children edged nearer. Their tongues licked their lips. Their fingers twitched and trembled.

"Let's break off a little piece," urged Hansel. "I'll just bet it's good, and it will never be missed."

"We—ll, I don't suppose it would do any harm," hesitated Gretel; "and I'm awfully hungry."

"So am I," said the boy.

And with that he broke off a tiny corner of the house and tasted it.

"Yum, yum! That is good!" he announced.

Gretel needed no further urging, and joined her brother in breaking off bits from this wonderful cottage.

Suddenly a squeaking voice was heard within the house:

Nibble, nibble, mousekin,
Who's nibbling at my housekin?

"What was that?" asked the boy starting back.

"Oh, it was only the wind," answered the girl.

They looked around a moment, but seeing and hearing nothing more they grew bolder. They broke off a picket of the fence and ate that.

They sampled one of the windows, and it was so good that they laughed and sang in great glee. But slowly they drew nearer the door, and at last a dreadful thing happened. The old witch stuck her head out, then crept out herself slyly, carrying a rope noose. This she suddenly threw over Hansel's head.

When he felt the noose tighten around his neck and turned and saw the ugly old crone at the other end of the rope, you may believe he howled with terror.

"Let me go! let me go!" he yelled.

But struggle as he might the old witch held him fast. Gretel herself stood rooted to the spot with terror. As the hag looked at her she felt like a bird being charmed by a snake.

Chuckling, the witch drew near to them and began to pat them with her clawlike fingers.

"He, he! Don't try to run away. Such pretty children, too! I just love children like you!"

But she smacked her lips and rolled her eyes, as she said it.

"Come with me, dearies," she continued in wheedling tones. "No need to eat my house down, for I will give you lots of nice things."

And she commenced telling about things good to eat, until the children began to forget their fear and go with her toward the door. But all

at once Hansel wriggled free from the rope and grasped his sister's hand.

"Don't go with her!" he shouted. "She wants to fatten us and eat us up! Run, Gretel, run!"

Away sped the children, but they did not get very far. The witch seized a wand of juniper and waved it in the air, chanting:

Hocus, pocus, witches' charm!
Move not as you fear my arm!

The children stood stock still. They could not move another inch. With another of her horrid chuckles the old crone came up to them and led them unresistingly to the side of the house where stood the empty cage. She opened the door and thrust the boy inside.

"There!" she said. "I shall keep you there until you are fat enough to cook. The girl is plump enough, and can help me get things ready."

She turned to Gretel who still stood rigid, and waving the juniper wand again she chanted:

Hocus, pocus, juniper,
Make this rigid body stir!

No sooner said than done. Gretel began to move about again.

"Now stir your stumps, my girl," ordered the witch. "Fetch me some fagots, for we want a good hot fire in the oven. Then bring me some pails of water."

Gretel turned to do as she was told, while the witch busied herself with poking food through the bars of the cage and into Hansel's mouth, for all the world as if she were stuffing a goose. After a time she stopped to rest, and she felt so happy over her double capture that she sang a weird song and mounted her broomstick for a short ride.

No sooner had she gone than Gretel ran out of the house and straight to Hansel's cage. She had listened carefully to the witch's charm, so now in her turn she waved the wand and chanted:

Hocus, pocus, juniper,
Make this rigid body stir!

Instantly the life came back into Hansel's limbs and he could move about as well as ever. But just at this moment the witch returned, so Gretel ran into the house again, and Hansel pretended to be just as he was before.

"How are you getting along, my little darling?" asked the witch, as she eyed the boy critically. "Here, stick out your thumb and let's see how fat you are."

Hansel pretended to do so, but instead thrust out a small stick. The witch felt it and grumbled to herself.

"I'm afraid it is going to take too long to fatten him up," she said. Turning she caught sight of Gretel, carrying wood. "Ah, she looks

better! She makes my mouth water just to look at her."

When from the oven I shall take her,
She'll look like a cake made by a baker.

"Come, my Gretelkin," she said in coaxing tones. "Look in at the oven door and see if the fire is hot enough."

"Be careful, Gretel!" warned Hansel in a low tone. And she answered him by a nod.

"Come, look in!" commanded the witch impatiently.

"I don't know how to open the door," said Gretel.

"Why, this way, numbskull," said the witch, opening the big oven door, and looking inside.

Instantly Gretel ran up back of her and gave her a mighty push. Hansel too had crept out of the cage, and he added his own strong young arms to the heave. In went the witch with a howl, and the door went shut with a bang.

"We've got her!" cried the children dancing about in glee.

Indeed they had, for not a sound came from the oven save the cracking and roaring of the flames. As the oven grew hotter it began to crack, and presently fell entirely apart. There inside stood a huge gingerbread cake. It was all that was left of the old witch.

Then another strange thing happened. The yard swarmed with other boys and girls who stood helpless, holding their arms out imploringly.

"Why—ee, its the fence!" exclaimed Hansel; "the gingerbread fence!"

He was right. When the witch was cooked, the enchantment ended, and the fence became real boys and girls again; only their eyes were shut and they could not move freely.

"Ah, touch us with the charm, that we may awake!" they called.

"Wait a minute," answered Gretel, and running and seizing the magic wand, she chanted:

Hocus, pocus, juniper,
Make this rigid body stir!

And at once the gingerbread children became laughing boys and girls again.

How they danced and played and sang! They broke off great pieces of the house and ate to their heart's content. And it is likely that they would be there eating yet, had not the broom-maker and his wife rushed in at this moment. How glad they were to see their children and all the other children safe and well! While as for Hansel and Gretel they gave a cry of joy and ran straight into their parents' outstretched arms.

THE KING'S CHILDREN

I

BACK in the gloomy depths of a dense forest there once nestled a tumble-down hut. Around it was a tiny clearing through which ran a brook, while above it towered a great cliff.

The hut itself was miserable enough, with its one window and one door, and a stovepipe sticking out at the eaves where a chimney should have been. It seemed to shrink away from the sight and sound of men, as well it might, for it was the abode of an ugly old Witch, who never spoke or thought of men except to curse them.

The only other occupant of this miserable shanty was a young girl, as fair as the Witch was hideous. No other home had she ever known; no other face did she remember seeing; for the Witch had kidnapped her when an infant and had kept her in ignorance of the rest of the world. Often the girl asked her about other people, and often she wondered if all were as hideous and ill-tempered as the Witch herself. But she could only form her own ideas about things, for the Witch never answered save by revilings and muttered curses.

The Witch, indeed, strove to implant hatred in her breast, to make of her another witch; but the girl's heart was too pure, her nature too sunny and joyous to harbor evil thoughts. This made her lot all the harder, for the Witch constantly scolded and sought for other tasks to inflict upon her. One daily duty, however, the girl did not mind. It was tending their flock of geese in the forest glade.

One sunny afternoon the Goosegirl—as we may call her—lay stretched upon a mossy bank by the side of the stream. Her geese wandered hither and thither, but they all loved her and came at her slightest call. As she lay, her glance wandered through the trees, outlined in golden patches by the sunlight. She heard and answered the wood-doves' note, for they also knew and loved her. She had woven a daisy chain and as she placed it upon her brow, she made a picture indeed fair to look upon. The sky was not bluer than her eyes; the sunlight not more golden than her stray locks of hair; the birch tree not more slender and graceful than her body.

Once again, as on many other days, she dreamed about that great world which lay outside the forest. What was it like? she wondered. Were the people in it good or bad, fair or foul? Surely it could not be so wretched as

her present abode. Surely folks were born for better things than tending geese. Something within her longed to be free—to hunt for happiness.

Her day-dreams were rudely broken by the harsh voice of the Witch.

"What are you doing, good-for-nothing? See where your geese are straying!"

The Goosegirl sprang up and hastily collected her flock, but when she turned again to the forest, the hag called her within.

"Come and help me, lazy-bones! There's witch's work to do!"

"Oh, please do not make me help you!" the girl cried, feeling instinctively that it was evil. "I do not want to become a witch."

"We'll see about that," answered the crone grimly. "Come, get to work, there's bread to knead."

The girl was powerless to resist, and set to work kneading a batch of bread as the Witch directed. Meanwhile the hag added to it many strange powders, over which she mumbled a spell. The loaf of bread was soon baked and came out of the oven looking fair enough, though of a curious smell.

"See!" said the Goosegirl, still animated by the joy of youth, as she held the magic loaf high

in the air. " 'Twill make true hearts love each other, when they eat of this."

"Thou fool!" retorted the Witch angrily, " 'Twill bring certain death to whomsoever tastes of it. And, remember, *thou* dids't make it. Not become a witch—he, he!"

Saying this, the hideous creature took her basket and started forth into the forest to gather herbs and roots for her evil brews. But first she warned the Goosegirl not to wander off, as the whole forest was enchanted, and she could not find her way out.

Long the girl sat and looked in horror at this thing she had done. Was she doomed to a life of evil, when there was the wish to do good in her heart?

Then little by little her spirits rose. The geese called her, and she went out and began to call them by name. They were the only friends she had in the whole wide world. She picked up her chaplet of flowers, placed it again upon her head, and looked at herself in the brook. The picture did not displease her, for she began to pirouette and sing. She was only an ignorant light-hearted Goosegirl, who did not know what vanity meant. She only knew that she was more pleasing to look upon, than was the old Witch.

"Look at me, geese!" she cried. "I am not ugly, like the Witch. I am beautiful!"

Here and there she ran, stopping to watch herself in the pool. She was like a nymph of old, and never was nymph more fair.

Suddenly she paused in alarm, for she heard another voice up the mountainside. It was not that of the Witch. It was a new and unheard-of voice. It was someone from the world of men, of which she had dreamed!

As she stood spellbound, the voice came nearer. It was singing like herself of life and love. She knew instinctively it was a young person like herself. No old crone could sing that way. Delicious thrills ran through her.

Then the bushes parted and a young man stood before her. His garments were torn and travel-stained, but he wore them with a proud air, and his noble bearing as well as the sword by his side told her untutored heart that here indeed was a kingly man.

For a moment each gazed at the other, both of them in surprise which gradually turned to delight in the other's beauty. The youth was the first to break the silence.

"Hey, Goosegirl," he laughed, "have you no word of welcome for me?"

Still the girl stared at him, not rudely, but

with a world of wonderment in her eyes. At last she found her voice.

"Are you a man?" she asked timidly.

Then indeed he laughed right merrily, and could not answer her for a moment.

"I hope so," he managed to answer, at length.

His merriment was contagious, and the Goosegirl was forced to laugh in her turn. That broke the ice of distrust and soon they were chatting away like old friends.

He told her that he was the son of a King, reared in the lap of luxury. His father's castle stood high up among the mountains, and the court gave itself up to idleness and pleasure. But as he grew to manhood the life palled upon him, and he had stolen forth quietly into the world to seek adventure, with nothing but a song on his lips and a sword at his side to aid him.

"Do you think me foolish?" he asked when he had ended his story.

"No," replied the Goosegirl. "It is what I, too, have always longed to do—to go out into the world to seek adventure."

The King's son looked earnestly into the depths of her blue eyes. What he saw there emboldened him to ask:

"Would you go with me?"

"I should like nothing better than—to go with you," she said simply.

As he gazed at her, he saw that she was something more than a Goosegirl. She held her head as proudly as did he, and he felt instinctively that she must have noble blood in her veins. What a companion she would be!

"Are you brave?" he asked earnestly.

"I should not need to be brave, if I were with you," she answered.

"Then you shall be my queen," he announced, placing his arms about her. "Come, I will exchange crowns with you."

And taking the daisy wreath from her head and placing it within his tunic, he drew forth a small crown of gold which he placed upon her head.

"Come away!" he said taking her by the hand.

But just then a violent gust of wind blew, as it were, from the cabin and went rushing and moaning through the trees. The girl drew back in sudden fright.

"No, no! I cannot go!" she said. "The Witch has laid a curse upon the forest, so that it will not let me pass!"

"Come!" he said again, not understanding her terror.

"I cannot!" she wailed.

"Then you are a coward. I cannot have a coward for my queen."

He turned to go, and she fell sobbing upon the ground. She could not make him understand that she was bewitched. The golden crown fell from her head unheeded and lay within the grass.

"Farewell," he said. "I shall not seek for you again, until a falling star from heaven drops within yon lily cup."

Pointing to a single flower which grew near the hut, he turned and left her.

The poor Goosegirl felt that now, indeed, all joy had gone out of life. She lay prostrate and wept bitterly, but as she heard the Witch's footsteps approaching, she hastily rose, hid the crown, and made as though she had been tending the geese.

With her usual scolding voice the Witch greeted her, and bade her stir about and prepare the evening meal.

Later, as the moon rose, still other unexpected guests sought out the little clearing in the forest. They were a Fiddler, a Woodcutter, and a Broom-maker, who had come in fear and trembling to ask the Witch's advice upon matters of state. Now that they had actually reached her threshold, each man hung back and waited for the other.

The Fiddler finally knocked at the door. There was no response and he knocked again, more boldly. The door suddenly opened and the Witch appeared.

"Begone, before I cast a curse upon ye!" she shrilled.

The Woodcutter and Broom-maker fled precipitately, awaiting no second command. The Fiddler, however, stood his ground and even had the audacity to smile at her.

"Good even to you, fair dame!" he said bowing politely.

This lack of fear nonplussed the hag. Her spells were powerless against one who did not fear her.

"What would ye?" she snapped.

The Fiddler called his trembling friends back, and among them they stated their errand.

The King of the neighboring land had just passed away, they said. The King's son had disappeared, none knew whither. So now the land was without a ruler. What should they do? They wanted someone of kingly descent, either prince or princess to reign over them. Could the Witch tell them where to seek?

The Witch glowered at them, and finally answered:

"Go back and tell your people that the first person who seeks to enter your gates at high

noon on the morrow is your ruler. Whether in rags or jewels, that is the one you seek. But your people are such fools, they may not know their King."

The Woodcutter and the Broom-maker were well pleased with this prophecy, even though it held a slur. They started back toward the city without further ado to tell the good news.

But the Fiddler lingered. He had caught sight of the girl within the hut, and now demanded that he should have word with her. As he spoke he looked the Witch squarely in the eye, and again she was powerless.

Grumbling, she called the girl outside. Like the Prince, the Fiddler was amazed at her beauty and regal bearing.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I do not know," she answered.

"Who is she?" he demanded of the Witch. "She is no kin of yours, I'll be bound!"

"No, she is none of mine," said the crone maliciously. "But, worse than that, she is the hangman's daughter. I rescued her."

"You lie," exclaimed the Fiddler. "She is of royal breeding. Look at her face, her eyes, her hair! She is worthy to sit beside the King's son, when we find him again."

Then taking the girl's hand he said, just as the King's son had said, earlier, "Come away!"

The Goosegirl lifted her face toward the sky and moved her lips. She was beseeching Heaven for guidance. With a sudden flash, a shooting star fell through the trees. It seemed to light upon the lily. With a cry of joy, the girl seized the golden crown from its hiding place, and showed it to the Fiddler.

"I am free!" she exclaimed. "Let us away!"

So heeding not the powerless curses of the Witch, and followed by the faithful geese, the Goosegirl went fearlessly with the Fiddler out into the great unknown world of men.

II

High noon drew on at the town of Hellabrun, and the entire populace stood on tiptoe of expectancy. The Woodcutter and the Broommaker had come back bearing great tales of their visit to the Witch. They strutted about like heroes, and boasted that they had compelled the old hag, by their bravery, to answer their questions. They told of her prophecy that the King and Queen would come to the gates at noon, but they did not give her closing words, that the people would be too witless to recognize them.

Great excitement prevailed as the morning wore by, and the populace thronged to the open square by the gate.

Meanwhile the King's son had come to the town the evening before, footsore and hungry, but none had recognized him. He was too proud to declare his rank or to beg food, so he sought work. He applied to the innkeeper whose hostelry stood hard by the gate.

"I am hungry," he said simply. "Can you give me honest work so that I can earn my bread?"

"We have naught to be done," replied the innkeeper gruffly, "except tending the swine."

A swineherd! The King's son's heart sank within him. It was the lowest of the low tasks. Yet the vision of the sweet face of the Goosegirl rose before him and shamed him for his false pride.

"I will be your swineherd," he said.

His first duties of the morning done, he cast himself wearily upon a bench. The innkeeper's daughter came out to fetch him his breakfast, and being attracted by his noble bearing, despite his menial labor, she tried to win his attention. But he only turned from her wearily.

Presently a little child, one of a group of girls, passed by. She darted a look at him and at once stopped and greeted him. Something in her glance told him that here was an understanding heart. He bade her stay by his side, and she laughed happily as she sat down at his

feet and rested her head confidingly against his knee.

"What is all this hubbub about?" he asked her.

"Why, don't you know?" she replied. "We are expecting our new King and Queen to enter the city gates to-day. The old Witch said so."

"How will you know your King and Queen?" he asked, and waited with no little anxiety for her reply. Mayhap the townspeople would recognize him despite his rags.

"Oh, some say that they will ride in on milk-white steeds; and others that they will wear crowns and jewels. I do not know how they will come. But something inside of us ought to tell us who they are."

And again the little maid looked into the Prince's dark eyes thoughtfully. But she said nothing more.

Now the innkeeper's daughter had grown very wroth when the young stranger disdained her society and devoted himself to the child. Out of malice she came out to the crowd which stood idly by waiting for something to happen, and said that this beggar was trying to cheat her. He had eaten a breakfast for which he had not paid.

At once the crowd, ready for a little cheap excitement, surged about him, and cries of, "We'll

tan his hide! Out with him! The scoundrel!" arose on all sides.

The King's son stood in their midst unafraid and with flashing eyes. Nevertheless it would have gone hard with him—cudgels were raised to give him a beating—when, Ding, dong! sounded the first strokes of twelve. The crowd turned to watch the city gate.

And what do you suppose they saw?

Down the highway leading to the gate came the Goosegirl, her golden hair falling over her shoulders, her faithful geese following along behind. On her head rested the golden crown. By her side stalked the Fiddler. Did anyone ever see so queer a royal procession?

As for the crowd, after the first gasp of amazement they began to titter and the titter grew into a roar of laughter. But the Goosegirl heeded them not. She had caught sight of the Prince and darted forward to meet him with a glad cry.

"I have come to be your queen!" she said.

Their queen—this Goosegirl! Was ever a joke so delicious? The crowd guffawed and hooted.

The King's son placed his arms protectingly around her, and turned upon the mob.

"Stop!" he thundered. "Have ye not eyes to

see? I am your rightful King, and this is to be my Queen."

"Ho ho! Listen to the beggar!" they railed. "King indeed! He is king of the swine, and she is queen of the geese!"

And delighted with their cheap jest they roared again.

Now the Fiddler interposed and tried to make his voice heard above the din.

"Fools!" he cried. "This is your King and Queen. It is as the Witch said—"

But he got no further. The crowd laid violent hands upon him and hustled him off to prison. Then with sticks and stones they drove the kingly children back outside the city gates, and slammed them in their face. After which the angry people slowly dispersed muttering to their homes.

Only one person remained. It was the little child, who lay upon the ground near the gate, sobbing as though her heart would break.

"Why do you cry, little one?" the last of the throng asked her.

"Oh, don't you know? You have driven away the King and his bride. And now they will never come again!"

III

Winter came to the forest. The green sward had disappeared under a mantle of snow. The pool bore a frozen surface. The trees were bare of leaves.

Around the Witch's hut all was bare and desolate. The Witch herself no longer lived there: for the populace infuriated at her prophecy, which for once in her long life was a true saying, had seized her and burned her at the stake.

Then after many weary weeks, the Fiddler had been released from prison, and had come to make his abode there, in the hope that he might get some tidings of the lost Prince and his bride. But no word came.

One day, however, while the snow still lay upon the ground, the little girl who had wept over their departure came to visit him at his hut, bringing with her a group of playmates.

"We are seeking our lost King and Queen," she said. "Will you not help us find them?"

"But it is the depth of winter," he protested. "Wait until the spring days come."

"We cannot wait," she said. "Mayhap they need us even now."

And the other children nodded their heads and said: "We cannot wait."

The Fiddler remonstrated no more, but took his hat and his beloved fiddle and led them out into the forest. From time to time he played a wild strain of music in the hope that the King's children might hear and answer.

The children were right in their belief that the two whom they sought were still in the forest, and that they were in need of succor. Up and down the world the two had wandered, and none had known them or dealt kindly with them.

In the days of fair weather the Prince had found various tasks by which he earned their daily bread. Their wants were few, and once back in the forest they were as carefree and joyous as children. But with the cold days of autumn and winter came want and suffering. The Prince tenderly loved and shielded the Goose-girl, but was powerless to ward off the Frost Giant's attack.

Back they came to the forest and on the very day that the Fiddler and the children set out in search of them they came to the hut, but by a different path.

It chanced that the Woodcutter and the Broom-maker had also come to the hut that day bearing a message to the Fiddler from the townspeople. They missed his merry music and were sorry they had mistreated him. They asked him to return. But the Fiddler disdained them.

Now as the two men sat huddled over a fire warming themselves, a feeble knock was heard at the door. The Woodcutter opened it and saw only a couple of beggars, as he thought.

"Away with ye!" he shouted. "We have naught for ye here!"

"But we are starving and cold," protested the King's son.

"Away with ye!"

"Away with ye!"

The youth retreated but only for a moment. His eyes rested upon the girl half swooning in the snow. He took the crown which they had steadfastly refused to part with until now, even for food, and broke it in two. Then he went again boldly to the door.

"Here is gold," he said. "Give us food."

The Broom-maker who came this time to the door, eyed the glittering object greedily. Then seizing it he stepped back and rummaged among the shelves. All he found was a loaf of bread; it was the magic loaf which the Goosegirl herself had been compelled to bake, months before, and its magic kept it fresh. But death lurked within.

Unknowing, the Prince eagerly clutched the bread and bore it to the fainting girl.

"Here is food!" he cried. "Take and eat!"

"Not unless you share it, too," she said in a weak voice. "I cannot eat unless you eat, beloved."

He broke the loaf and fed it to her piece by piece, eating some himself as she desired. And as they ate the bitter bread their strength came again for a moment, and they lived over in memory the bright days of autumn. It had been a joyous world after all, for they had found love.

But in a little while their voices grew feeble again. The deadly poison now began to course through their veins. They looked into each other's eyes and knew that their moments were numbered.

"Kiss me, beloved," she whispered.

"My Queen!" he answered, pressing her to his heart.

Thus it was that the Fiddler and the children found them, at the close of day when they returned from their quest. The snowflakes, kinder than mankind, had fallen gently upon them and enshrouded them as with a blanket.

Heartbroken, the little group made a grave for them upon the slope of the mountain. There the King's children might rest undisturbed, and in their long slumber dream perchance of the other children of Kings doomed to wander up and down the earth, unrecognized save by those whose hearts are touched with love.

MARTHA

I

THE Lady Henrietta was bored almost to death. Although a maid-of-honor to good Queen Anne, and one of the most spoiled beauties of that fashionable court, she was feeling frightfully dull, on the morning our story opens.

"What is the use of it all?" she complained to her maid, Nancy, a pert, good-looking girl about her own age. "You get up in the morning, make your toilet, go to breakfast, ask the Queen if she has any orders for the day, make your toilet again, go to luncheon, make your toilet again, go to afternoon tea or some dreary reception, make your toilet again, go to dinner, then to a ball—oh heavens above, I'm sick of it all!"

"Oh, my lady!" cried Nancy. "Surely you don't mean that! Why, you have half the courtiers making eyes at you!"

"Faugh! They make me weary!" said the spoiled maid-of-honor, proving that even in those days of a century or so ago, ladies were hard to please, and also that they used slang.

"But, my lady, see! Here are some lovely posies that Lord Tristan sent you only to-day—"

"Lord Tristan can keep his old flowers. Goodness knows, he needs bedecking more than I do!"

How long Henrietta would have ranted we do not know, for just then a visitor was announced, who proved to be Lord Tristan himself. He was a weatherbeaten old fop, who tried to hide his advancing years and corpulent figure under exceedingly smart clothes. Perhaps that was what the lady meant by saying he needed decoration.

Lady Henrietta greeted him politely but somewhat coldly. This, however, did not dash his spirits. He bowed and pranced like a mere youth.

"Ah, Lady Henrietta!" he sighed. "Looking more charming than ever. I have come to learn what your wishes are for the day. If there is any amusement which would please you—pray name it."

"Is there anything new under the sun?" she asked impatiently.

"Why—er—yes," he hesitated, racking his brain for an idea that would please her.

Just then he heard the strains of a distant

street band approaching, and for want of a better suggestion, he said,

"There's the Fair at Richmond. It's an annual event, you know."

"Well, what about it?" she snapped. You see, she was determined to be rude, and poor Lord Tristan had gotten on her nerves.

"Well, you see—" he floundered. "They have music and dancing and races and exhibits of all sorts; prize cows and horses and donkeys—"

"We can see donkeys enough without going to the Fair," said Henrietta, looking at her cavalier.

"Yes, I know," he said trying to laugh; "but I mean *real* ones."

"So do I," she said.

How much longer she would have badgered him is not certain, but the music had come nearer, and now they heard the sound of voices singing. Henrietta and Nancy went to the window and looked out. It was a gay party of country lads and lasses decked out in their rustic best and going to the Fair.

"They look as though they were having a good time, at any rate," sighed the discontented lady. "Wonder what they are going to do at the Fair?"

"Going to seek service mayhap," said Lord Tristan, still eager to please. "Every year at

the Fair some of these country yokels sell their services for a twelve-month to the highest bidder. Frightfully common idea—what?"

His last remark was unfortunate, for Henrietta was determined to disagree with him that day.

"Common idea?" she echoed. "Not at all! It's an uncommon idea, and I'll wager it would be a lark! Come on! let's try it."

"Try what?" asked the old chap bewildered at this sudden turn of events.

"Try being peasants and selling ourselves to the highest bidder. Won't it be great fun! No more dullness for to-day. Come on. We'll borrow some old things and deck ourselves out as farmer's daughters, Nancy and I; while you will make a good stable boy."

"Not I!" cried the foppish courtier in dismay.

"Yes, you will too! You came in here awhile ago placing yourself unreservedly at my orders for the day; and you yourself mentioned the Fair. So you're engaged as stable boy. Come on—let's go!"

As usual, Lady Henrietta had her way. Nancy fell in with the plan readily enough, but Tristan grumbled under his breath at this unexpected turn of events.

An hour or so later, beheld the odd-looking trio trudging along the highway to the Fair.

Henrietta was in high spirits. All her former petulance was gone. This promised to be a lark indeed.

II

Once arrived at the Fair, one would have had to be surly in very truth not to enter into the spirit of it. Every one seemed to be in rare good humor. There were Morris dances on the green sward, to the tune of bagpipe, fife, and fiddle. There were rustic sports of all sorts such as bowling, quoit pitching, and archery. There were races by man and beast. There were great tankards of cider and ale, flanked by huge sausages, fat plum puddings, and other good things.

But the chief interest of the day centered in the servant exchange—if such it might be called. In those days there was no such thing as an employment agency, so this Fair served as a meeting place between employer and employee. Here servants were hired for a year in advance, and bound themselves faithfully to serve their masters for that length of time.

Henrietta's quick eye caught sight of a long row of country girls standing in line awaiting a possible employer, and taking advantage of Tristan's momentary absence she said to Nancy:

"Quick! Here's our chance. Let's get in line."

Suiting the action to the word, she pulled the other girl over with her, and they lined up with the rest. But despite the fact they had obtained the simplest clothes they could find at short notice, they were easily the smartest appearing lassies of the lot. Their dainty ribbons and smart slippers and stockings contrasted oddly with the rough-and-ready attire of the other servant girls.

Now it so chanced that two young but prosperous farmers had come to the Fair that day, interested only in the servant question. Their lands were well enough tended—they could see to that— but their house was going to wrack and ruin, as one expressed it, for want of a woman's guiding hand.

"I'll tell you what, Lionel," said Plunkett, "we've got to have a good girl in the house, maybe two of them. Let's get the best ones we can, and hang the expense!"

"So say I," agreed Lionel heartily. "T'will be money well spent."

While they were in this frame of mind, they wandered along the row of maidens, and at once caught sight of Henrietta and Nancy. The young farmers exchanged glances.

"They'll do," they said in a breath.

They lost no time in trying to strike a bargain with the supposed servants, but at first made

little progress. Henrietta was so bubbling over with laughter that she couldn't answer him, and in sooth his questions about cooking, mending, and cleaning were too much for her. She had heard of such things, but only at a distance—still, she did not tell them so.

Lionel and Plunkett mistook her hesitancy for unwillingness to accept their terms. So they raised their offers until they finally tendered a wage about twice what they had intended to pay.

"Who could resist such a fine offer?" said Henrietta laughing.

"You accept then?" asked Lionel eagerly.

"Yes."

"Then here's a shilling to bind the bargain," he said, pressing the coin into her hand.

She accepted it still in a spirit of jest, and not knowing she had thus entered into a year's contract. But they were soon enlightened as to the true situation, when Tristan came elbowing through the throng. He had been looking for them everywhere.

"Oh, here you are at last," he exclaimed much relieved. "Now if you've had enough of it, let's go home."

"Not so fast, bumpkin," said the two farmers. "You can't hire these girls, we've already hired them."

"You've—what do you mean?" sputtered Tristan.

"Just what we say. We've hired them and paid a deposit."

"Oh, that's all right," protested the courtier, "I'll return your money to you with interest. Here's a pound note—"

"Stand aside, fool," said Lionel beginning to lose patience. "A bargain's a bargain. These girls are coming home with us."

"Oh, but that won't do, you know," said Tristan, beginning to grow alarmed.

The girls too were ill at ease, but preferred to have him speak for them at this juncture. But when he tried to take them by the arms, the farmers cried out:

"We'll see about that!"

And summoning the sheriff they laid the case before him. A crowd of country folk had gathered also, and the verdict was unanimous—

"A bargain's a bargain!"

So while Tristan still sputtered with impotent rage, and the girls kept silent through dismay, the latter were bundled into the big farm wagon and escorted home by Lionel and Plunkett in triumph.

III

Out at the farm the triumph of the two young men speedily turned to dismay. They found that their new servants didn't want to do a thing. "Julia"—as Nancy had styled herself—couldn't wash a couple of dishes without dropping one of them. While "Martha"—as Henrietta was called— seemed to take it as an insult when asked to lend a hand with the housework.

Poor Lionel and Plunkett had to do their own cooking in order to get anything fit to eat. But they still hoped that in time their two good-looking servants would prove good for something.

Plunkett raged around at a great rate, when each new crash of the crockery in "Julia's" hands threatened to make an end of all their cooking and eating utensils. But Lionel, who was more gentle, counselled patience.

"Give them time," he said. "You cannot expect them to learn our way of doing things in a day or a week."

He himself tried to teach "Martha" to spin, and although she was awkward about this as about every other task, she made such a charming picture as she sat at the spinning-wheel, that he could not find it in his heart to scold her. In-

stead, he was becoming more and more infatuated with her charms, just as the courtiers had been.

"Come, this is no task for those fair fingers," he said at last. "Perhaps you could play or sing." And he pointed to an old-fashioned spinet, partly in jest.

"Martha" took him at his word, however, and sat down at the spinet, running her hands lightly over the keys. Lionel noticed that she wore rings which flashed as she began to play.

"A queer sort of servant, I've got!" he said to himself.

Then she began to sing. It was a tender little ballad, "The Last Rose of Summer," but as her sweet voice ended, the enchantment for him was complete. Forgetting everything but the present moment he cast himself at her feet.

"Martha, can't you understand? I love you, dear! I do not want you for a servant. I want you for my wife!" he declared.

Henrietta was amazed. She was not expecting so speedy a conquest. In her confusion she sought refuge in laughter.

Lionel dismayed rose to his feet just as Plunkett and "Julia" entered the room.

"She is a baggage!" declared Plunkett hotly. "Can't teach her a thing. And she idles all the time, instead of doing her work."

"Then why not do it yourself?" asked Nancy saucily.

"Do it myself? What did I hire you for?" he sputtered. Then as the girl laughed, he grew red in the face and shook his fist at her.

"I can't help but like you, you saucy jade!" he announced suddenly. "I'll tell you what—I'll marry you, then we'll see who's boss!"

"The Lord preserve us!" cried Nancy growing red in her turn.

Just then the clock tolled out the hour of twelve.

"Come, girls," announced Lionel striving to hide his own discomfiture. "It is time you retired for the night, if you are to get rest enough to do your work to-morrow."

The girls, nothing loath to get rid of their suitors, bade them good-night and went to their own room. Once alone they stared at each other.

"This will never do," said Henrietta.

"I should say not," echoed Nancy.

"I thought that when they found we didn't know how to cook or do anyhing else, they would be glad to let us go," said Henrietta.

"So did I. I smashed up most of their dishes."

"And now look at them!" continued Henrietta, doubtless meaning the farmers, and not the dishes.

"We must get out of this," said Nancy.

"But how?"

As if in answer, a low whistle, was heard outside their window. They hastened to it, and looked out. Standing in the farmyard beside a carriage was Lord Tristan. He had traced them to the farm and was now come to aid them to escape.

Fortunately the window was fairly near the ground. The girls lost no time in climbing out. They jumped into the carriage, and away they went, before the two farmers knew what was happening.

IV

You would have thought that, after the two girls proved to be such poor servants, the men would indeed have thought themselves well rid of them. But not so. They searched the countryside for them and wandered around like crazy fellows. Plunkett confessed that he couldn't break a dish without thinking of "Julia;" while Lionel couldn't bear to look at the spinning-wheel, and was haunted by the strains of "The Last Rose of Summer" which echoed through his head.

So I am afraid these two young farmers were very much in love.

One day not long after, as Plunkett was walking through the forest on his way to Richmond,

he heard the strains of a hunting horn. Some of the Queen's court were out amusing themselves by riding after a stag; and presently the party appeared, making a fine sight amid the autumn leaves, on their spirited steeds and dressed in rich scarlets, yellows and blues.

As Plunkett stood aside for them to pass, his heart turned over a couple of times and stopped. Wasn't that handsomely gowned maiden in the center of the throng his "Julia?" He couldn't be mistaken, and yet if he had stopped to reason it out, he would have known that no serving lass would be thus attired and in such company. But love is both blind and unreasoning. Forward he sprang and laid hold of her horse's bridle.

"Ah, I have found you!" he cried. "Now I guess you'll come home with me."

"What do you mean, bumpkin?" exclaimed Nancy, for it was she.

"Come, now, you know who I am. If you don't come quietly I'll call the sheriff," he persisted.

"Help!" screamed Nancy. "This crazy man is trying to run off with me!"

At that the rest of the hunters came rushing up and laid rough hands upon poor Plunkett. He was so belabored that he was glad to beat a hasty retreat.

In another part of the same wood, a similar episode took place. Lionel was wandering distractedly about, singing sad ditties, and trying to forget his lost "Martha"—which was a poor way to forget her, wasn't it? Singing lovesick ballads never did have such a result, not even in comic opera.

In the midst of his wanderings he saw a lady, dressed as a huntress, and likewise alone. Something in the turn of her head reminded him of "Martha." But what could she be doing here and in this guise? Slowly he drew nearer.

Just then she began to sing softly to herself, and at once he recognized the loved voice.

"'Tis she—my Martha!" he cried springing forward.

Naturally Henrietta was startled, but she was surprised to find her own heart giving a sudden throb of pleasure.

"Lionel!" she exclaimed, then drew back coldly. It would never do for a highborn lady to smile upon a common farmer. At least, so they thought in those days.

Lionel, however, was so delighted at the sight of his runaway servant that he made no effort to conceal the state of his mind. He told her he loved her madly, that he hadn't been able to forget her a minute, that he would go crazy if

she didn't return to him, and a lot of other things of that sort.

Henrietta was secretly pleased, but never for the world would she have let him know it. She called him presumptuous, and baseborn, and a fool for daring to aspire to her hand.

"Then you will not listen to me?" he cried.

"No!" she stormed, and stamped her foot. She was used to stamping her foot to the courtiers, and watching them tremble. But Lionel was not a courtier.

"We shall see about that," he said quietly. "At any rate you'll come back home with me and serve out your year."

"I'll do nothing of the sort."

"Then I'll have to call upon the sheriff, if you don't come along quietly."

"Help!" shrieked Henrietta in her turn. "Here's a madman trying to carry me off!"

The rest of the hunting party were not far away, and they came flying to the rescue. Poor Lionel suffered at their hands just as Plunkett had done, but his physical injuries were nothing compared to his mental anguish when he heard the others address his "Martha" as "my lady." He saw in a flash that he had been tricked by a court lady who had been amusing herself at his expense.

Knowing now that his love could never be requited, he shook himself loose from the detaining hands and turned to go. But first he poured forth a speech of bitter reproach against the one who had thus shamed him. She hung her head in silence, but when the huntsmen would have pinioned him, she motioned that he should be set free.

Plunkett also had been attracted thither by the uproar, and now viewed with amazement this other serving wench in the garments of a fine court lady. He saw, too, the predicament his poor friend was in, and that nothing was to be gained by making a scene.

"Come, Lionel," he said laying his hand quietly on the other's arm. "These great folk have had enough fun at our expense. Come—let's go home."

V

Plunkett feared for his friend's reason in the days that followed. Lionel took no interest in anything but sat moping around the house the livelong day.

Then Plunkett bethought himself of another thing. His friend was not really related to him in any way. Although he had been brought up as a brother, there was a mystery connected with Lionel's birth. He had been left at the

farmhouse as an infant, with no clue to his identity save a ring tied around his neck by a ribbon. Lionel's father who had brought him thither, and who seemed to be a fugitive, died soon afterward. His only request was that should the child ever need help, this ring should be presented to the Queen.

This was the time—Plunkett decided—when Lionel needed help; so he himself took the ring to Queen Anne and told his story.

Wonder of wonders! The Queen listened to him, and then told him that his friend was the rightful Earl of Derby. Lionel's father had been wrongfully accused of treason, and his lands confiscated. Now, she said, she was ready to restore to the son his lands and title.

She entrusted her maid-of-honor, the Lady Henrietta, with the pleasant task of bearing this news to Lionel. Henrietta's heart had smitten her because of her past treatment of him, and she returned gladly to the old farmhouse, determined to make amends. But Lionel only greeted her with a vacant stare.

"Lionel!" she called, holding out her hands to him, "Don't you recognize me? See—I bring you a message from the Queen. You are the rightful Earl of Derby, and a great nobleman!"

"Away with you! It is only a trick!" he raved. "I am as much an earl as you were a serving girl.

Haven't you done enough? Can't you leave me in peace?"

The poor fellow wandered off, and Henrietta was in despair. How could she prove to him that she really loved him?

Nancy had come with her, and the interview between her and Plunkett had been more fortunate. They decided that, after all, they cared for each other and would be wedded. But just now their own happiness gave way to concern for Lionel.

"I have it!" said the quick-witted Nancy; and she whispered her plot in her companion's ear.

He clapped his hands. "The very thing!" he said. And Henrietta, when she heard about it, thought so too.

The next day, Plunkett said to his friend,

"We must start to town early, this morning, as it is Fair day."

"What is that to us?" inquired Lionel stupidly.

"Why, a lot. We've got to have servants to run this place, haven't we? Well, now's the time to get them."

It really was not the regular Fair day, but Nancy and Henrietta, aided by their friends, made it appear so. There were booths and games and dances, just as before, and a throng of make-believe servants waiting to be hired.

Plunkett dragged his unwilling friend along, until they came to the Fair grounds. Once inside, the demented man began to brighten up and look around him. The scene recalled old memories. And see! There was the group of serving lassies, with "Martha" and "Julia" among them!

Plunkett did not have to urge him further. Together they rushed up to the girls.

"We would seek service," the girls said demurely.

"What can you do?" asked Plunkett.

"Why, I can do anything," answered the saucy "Julia," "if you don't mind my breaking a few things while I learn!"

As for Lionel he only stared at "Martha," but the light of reason came back into his face as he gazed.

"Martha! Is it you?" he cried.

For answer, she handed him a nosegay of flowers, then began singing again:

> 'Tis the last rose of summer
> Left blooming alone.

The tones of that dear voice completed his cure. With a glad cry that was half a sob he clasped the singer in his arms.

MIGNON

I

IT WAS a holiday in a German village, and everyone was idling and making merry. The students had laid aside their books for the day, and only those shops remained open, which sold good things to eat and drink.

Out in a public square before the one tavern that the town possessed, a motley throng had gathered, but all were in a royal good humor. The day was bright and sunny, there was no work to do, and singing, dancing, eating and drinking were the order of the day.

In the center of the throng was a band of gipsies who had come to the town the night before, attracted by the holiday crowd and the prospect of silver pennies honestly earned, and perhaps other pickings not quite so honest. The gipsies had begun their performance early in the day, and had kept it up, as the crowd constantly shifted, until some of the actors were ready to drop from weariness. But Giarno, the chief, believed in the old proverb, "Make hay while the sun shines," and so constantly urged his performers on to new efforts.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced for the twentieth time, trying in vain to make his naturally cruel and ugly face look pleasant; "ladies and gentlemen, I shall now present to you a wonderful dancer, who will do for you her wonderful egg dance."

So saying, he beckoned to a young girl, who lay resting on the ground, to get up. She was so fatigued, however, that she refused to obey him. It was plain to be seen that she feared him, but also plain that she had reached the limit of her endurance.

"Come, get up, lazy bones!" he snarled.

"I won't!" she panted in a weak voice, but nevertheless in tones of defiance.

"What?" he shouted, scarcely believing his ears. "Come, I say!"

But the girl lay still—only her big, velvety dark eyes watching intently his next move.

If one could but have lifted the veil behind those beautiful eyes, a sorrowful past would have been revealed. Mignon, for that was the maiden's name, had scarcely known anything but blows and hardship throughout her short life. Her earliest memories were of wandering up and down the country with the gipsies, enduring cold and hunger in the winter, and heat and weariness in the summer. She could not remember a father or a mother, but still she instinctively

felt that she was of better blood than these rough vagrants. And most of all she hated and feared the cruel leader, Giarno. To-day at last she was determined to defy him, come what might.

She was not long in doubt. Despite the throng, Giarno sprang at her with a heavy stick upraised and the next moment it would have descended upon her shoulders; but it was arrested in midair by another arm. An aged harper had pressed forward, and now stood confronting the gipsy who was twice his size.

"Courage, little one!" he said.

The crowd applauded him heartily. This little scene was better than a play, they said. Lothario, the Harper, was a familiar figure upon the streets. His long, flowing white locks, and the faraway look in his eye, gave rise to the belief that he was half crazy. Nevertheless, he was harmless, and he played his harp so well that folks were always glad to have him visit them. He never stayed long in one place but wandered from town to town, always with that faraway look in his eye, as though he were searching—searching. But none knew the object of his quest.

The gipsy glared in amazement at this feeble old champion of the girl—then his fury redoubled he raised his stick again to strike. It is

probable that the old man as well as the young girl would have suffered this time—as Giarno had no respect for either gray hairs or innocence—had not still another bystander taken a hand in affairs.

"You bully!" shouted a young fellow in student costume, who had but just that moment come upon the scene. "You bully! Why don't you pick upon someone your size. Come—if you are looking for a real fight, I'll give you all the fight you want!"

And with a sudden quick movement he wrenched the club from Giarno's grasp. The crowd cheered at this but the student paid no heed to them. His flashing blue eyes glared at the gipsy, and the latter, coward that he was, quailed before them.

"What do you mean, you ruffian!" roared the student.

"None of your affair," blustered the other.

"I'll make it my affair," answered the young fellow. "What was she doing?"

"She is idle and disobedient."

"You mean, she doesn't dance every time you whistle. Well, listen to me. I'll break every bone in your body if I catch you mistreating her again!"

The crowd cheered anew, but the student

seeing that all the fight was taken out of the bully, turned on his heel and left them.

Wilhelm Meister, as he was called, was a student out—as he might have expressed it—"on a lark." He was tired of the drab walls of the university at Vienna and he wanted to see something of the world. He came of good family, had a little ready money in his pocket, and a friendly bearing that easily won him welcomes; so why should he not have his fling?

He had scarcely glanced at the young girl he had rescued, and was really somewhat disappointed that he hadn't had a first-class fight. Which only goes to show that he was ready for anybody and anything.

Now it so chanced that the little set-to was witnessed by a strolling actress, named Philina, from the balcony of the tavern. Philina was a beautiful and an accomplished woman of the world, who was as fickle as she was fair. She liked to make conquests among the other sex, just to show her power. To-day she was greatly attracted by the manly bearing of Wilhelm Meister, and decided to make his acquaintance forthwith.

This was easily managed through the medium of Laertes, a strolling actor, who at her bidding sought out the youth and engaged him in conversation. They sat down to refresh themselves

at a table in the inn-yard, and while chatting, the lovely Philina wandered in, oh so casually.

The introduction took place, and she was persuaded after a little urging to take her seat with them at the table. The student was charmed by her looks and manner, for she lost no time in employing all her wiles upon him.

"How brave of you!" she cooed, "to face that savage-looking man!"

"Oh, it was nothing," protested Wilhelm, but he felt pleased nevertheless.

She led him on to talk about himself, and they had the friendliest of chats before she rose to go—not, however, until she had promised to see him again on the morrow.

"Isn't she a glorious creature!" he exclaimed to his new friend, Laertes, after she had re-entered the tavern.

"H-m, yes!" replied the actor. "But— if you will pardon me, I will give you a bit of friendly advice."

"What is it?"

"She is a regular man-killer! Don't you fall into her clutches. She catches a new one every week!"

"Nonsense!" laughed the student, secretly determined more than ever to get better acquainted with this lady.

Still occupied with this newest adventure in his thoughts, he wandered back into the open square, when a soft voice called to him. He looked quickly around. It was the gipsy dancer whom he had rescued.

"Ah, noble sir!" she said timidly, but with a grateful look in her eyes. "Permit me to thank you! A kind deed such as yours never goes unrewarded by Heaven."

Struck by the simple beauty of the girl, Wilhelm stopped and began to question her about her life. In little bits she let him see her unhappy situation. She was convinced, she said, that she had been stolen by the gipsies in childhood. She seemed to remember a childhood's home.

"Knowest thou the land where the citron blooms?" she asked. "The land redolent with the odor of orange blossoms?"

Wilhelm was convinced that she spoke of Italy.

As they talked, the swarthy Giarno approached, but this time craftily. He knew that nothing was to be gained by opposing this determined young man. Now he had a deeper plan.

"Good sir," he whined. "Mignon has told you that she is not one of us. It is true. She was held for ransom, but as no one came to

claim her, we have been forced to bring her up as one of our own. And we are very fond of her, I assure you, though at times she is idle and disobedient."

His eyes glittered, and as Wilhelm did not say anything, he continued:

"Now I have a plan. You seem interested in the girl, and might perhaps find her people for her. If you will pay her ransom price—a mere matter of a hundred ducats—I will surrender all claim to her."

As Wilhelm looked at the oily rascal he was tempted to strike him, but calmer counsel prevailed. After all, why should he not buy this poor girl's freedom. It was the easiest way out of a life of bondage for her.

"You mean that you will give her her freedom?"

"Yes," said Giarno, wishing now that he had named a larger sum.

Wilhelm glanced around at the maiden, who looked at him imploringly. The only other witness to the transaction was the aged harper, who had followed the girl around all day—seemingly wishing to protect her. He also seemed to approve; so the impulsive student produced his purse.

"Done!" he said, and counted out the gold pieces, into the gipsy's eager palm.

After the latter had retired chuckling over his good fortune, the poor child sank on her knees before her deliverer, and began again to pour forth her thanks. In her eyes this handsome, happy-go-lucky fellow was a veritable fairy prince.

"It was nothing," he protested, flushing like a schoolboy.

Then the oddity of the situation began to dawn upon him.

"Oh, I say," he began. "What are we to do with you? Place you in some school, I fancy."

"No, no! let me go with you!" pleaded the girl, who really looked and acted no more than a child as she knelt there. "I could don a page's costume, and be able to serve you."

"But we ought to provide a guardian for you," he urged.

Lothario, the Harper, stepped forward. "I'll go along and look after her," he said simply; and as there seemed to be no better arrangement, Wilhelm said, "All right."

Their first adventure was not long in showing itself. That same evening Laertes and Philina told him they had just received news of a fine engagement for them. A certain Baron Rosenberg had invited their company to present some plays at his castle. Now they

suggested that Wilhelm go along as one of the troupe; and Wilhelm nothing loath consented.

True to his promise, he told his new "page" and her guardian that they might go also; so on the morrow this strangely assorted company set out for the castle.

II

At the Baron's castle they found a fête in progress, and thanks to Friedrich, the Baron's nephew, who was a devoted admirer of Philina, her company was shown every attention. She herself was ensconced in a fine suite of rooms, with servants to wait upon her, and the others were comfortably housed also.

But although the foppish Friedrich showered attentions upon her, it still suited her whim to favor Wilhelm. He, poor lad, was infatuated by her smiles, and lost no time in telling her how devoted he was to her service.

Mignon, the little page, overheard these avowals and a pang shot through her heart; for already she loved this handsome youth with her whole heart. And as she compared her plain attire of a page with the bewitching costumes of the actress, she felt that her lot was indeed hopeless.

"If I could only have fine clothes too," she thought, "perhaps he would look at me sometimes."

Fired with a sudden thought, she watched her chance and when Philina and the others had left the room, to make plans for their play in the garden, Mignon picked up some of the actress's pretty garments with eager, trembling fingers. She donned them one by one, standing before a mirror and humming little snatches of song.

What a transformation! The plain little page became a lovely girl whose charms would eclipse even those of the alluring actress.

But just at this moment she heard footsteps approaching and hastily sprang into a closet and pulled the curtains before her.

Friedrich had come to pay court to his fair guest, and missing her turned to confront Wilhelm, who was on the same mission. The two rivals glared at each other, and moved by a common impulse drew their swords. The world was too small for both of them to live in at once, they declared fiercely, as rivals will.

What might have happened to one or the other of these foolish swains, we do not know; but at the first clash of their weapons the curtains of the closet parted, and Mignon sprang forth and rushed between the combatants.

Wilhelm stared at this beautiful apparition for a full minute before recognizing her.

"You, Mignon!" he exclaimed at last.

"You must not fight!" she panted, flashing those glorious dark eyes upon him.

"No, we must not. 'Tis foolish!" he agreed promptly; and bowing to Friedrich he put up his sword.

The other man followed suit, and with a formal bow left the apartment.

"Now, my dear child," said Wilhelm, in a voice which he strove to make stern and fatherly, "you mustn't run around like this. Besides, I have been thinking things over. You really must go to school somewhere."

"By all means!" added a mocking voice; and turning they beheld Philina, whose eyes were dancing at the scene before her.

"My dear child, how fine you look in my clothes!" she continued sneeringly. "Who would have dreamed that our page could have it in her! Since the things become you so well—you are welcome to them."

"No! Take your old things! I hate them! I hate you!" stormed Mignon, and tore off the borrowed plumage, scattering it right and left over the floor. Then, as a page once more, she dashed furiously out of the room.

"Phew!" whistled the actress. "Who would have dreamed that your beloved page had all that spunk!"

But amid all her jesting, she eyed him keenly. As for Wilhelm, he only stared. Hitherto he had regarded Mignon only as a child. Now he saw the dawning woman, and the thought of her dark eyes and the toss of her head sent a strange thrill through him.

Meanwhile, poor Mignon felt that she had made a fool of herself, and also that she had betrayed her heart's secret to both Wilhelm and this scornful lady. As she wandered through the castle grounds she imagined she could hear them laughing at her expense.

Unable to endure the torture of her thoughts any longer she paused on the bank of a swift-flowing stream, and was on the point of hurling herself into it, when the strains of sweet music came to her ear. It was Lothario, the mad Harper, who now arrived just in time to keep her from rashness and soothe her troubled spirit.

As he continued to play, she sank down on the ground and sobbed.

"My poor child, what is troubling you?" he asked, laying his hand on her head.

"Oh, I hate them! I hate them!" she burst out again. "I wish their old castle would burn to the ground, so I do!"

It was only an idle wish which she was far from meaning, and she would have been startled indeed if she had seen the fierce look which came into the old man's face as presently he stole quietly away.

Meanwhile the company of actors was giving an open-air play, which was received with great enthusiasm. Philina looked entrancingly lovely as she played the part of a fairy queen, and the audience, especially young Friedrich, pelted her with flowers.

Mignon stole up to the outskirts of the throng, her heart filled with bitterness. Why was it, she asked herself, that some were born to win praise and garlands, while others were doomed to blows and sorrows? We must not blame Mignon too much, for she, poor child, had had more than her share of hardship. And now she saw the dearest being to her in the world—Wilhelm Meister—paying court with all the others to this reigning beauty.

As she stood there, the old minstrel came softly to her side, a look of triumph on his face.

"I have done it!" he said; "I have carried out your wishes!"

She stared at him without grasping his meaning. Had she looked up, she would have seen smoke coming from an upper window of the

castle. He had interpreted her words too literally—words which she herself had forgotten.

Just then the play came to an end, and the guests crowded around the actors to congratulate them. But strange to say, Wilhelm did not join them. He had caught sight of the forlorn figure of his little page instead, and some strange impulse caused him to seek her out, rather than Philina.

It was not long before that fickle beauty missed him, and her roving eye caught sight of him by Mignon's side. With a forced laugh she summoned Wilhelm to her, saying at the same time:

"I have forgotten the bouquet that you gave me. It is in my apartment upstairs. Might I ask your page to fetch it to me?"

Mignon turned without a word and entered the castle door. As she did so, a gust of smoke greeted her, and in a flash she recalled Lothario's words. The demented man had set fire to the castle! But as for her she would not turn back. What difference would it make to anyone, even if she did perish in the flames? On she went to get her rival's bouquet of flowers.

A burst of flame from an upper window apprised the others of the danger. Cries arose on every side, but it was soon seen that the build-

ing was doomed. Parts of it were already a seething furnace.

Then Wilhelm remembered the girl, and with a cry he sprang toward the door.

"Come back!" shrieked Philina; "You will only perish!"

"I must save her!" he shouted in reply, and was already within the castle.

After a few minutes which seemed like hours, he was seen to emerge again. His figure was blackened by smoke, his hair scorched, his face blistered. He staggered rather than walked beneath the burden which he carried in his arms. It was the unconscious body of Mignon.

The first to greet them was Lothario, who had awaited the rescue in an agony of hope and despair. When he saw them come forth to the light of day again, something seemed to snap within his brain. The shock had restored his reason. Now as he sprang forward and took the unconscious girl from Wilhelm's arms, he assumed charge of affairs with all the coolness of a general. He ordered restoratives brought, and bandages; the servants and rest of the household obeying him without a question. It was only after the excitement was over, that anyone realized that the old harper was a changed man.

Presently he turned to Wilhelm, who lay resting from his fatigue and injuries.

"My son," he said in a clear, firm voice, "this poor child needs care and a change of scene. I am going to take her with me to Italy."

And after one look at Lothario's face, Wilhelm assented to the plan without protest.

III

Wilhelm speedily recovered from his own hurts, but with Mignon away he felt strangely dissatisfied with life. The old care-free days had gone, and he caught himself wondering hourly how she fared with her aged protector. Philina still smiled upon him, as she saw that his thoughts wandered away from her.

At last one day he bluntly announced that he was going to Italy to seek Mignon, and despite her protests he set forth.

Lothario had said that their destination was Cipriani, which proved to be a lordly castle on the shores of a beautiful lake. With some hesitation he inquired if there was an old harper there, by the name of Lothario. The servants without delay summoned the old man, who greeted Wilhelm kindly. There was a sense of poise and power about him which told Wilhelm at once that Lothario was fully restored to health; but what further surprised the young student was the unquestioning obedience that was given Lothario by all the servants. Still he

did not stop to think a second time about this, but inquired eagerly after Mignon's health.

"She has had a great shock," said Lothario sadly, "and has not yet recovered her senses. She has been, and is still very ill."

"May I see her?" inquired Wilhelm anxiously.

"You may," assented the other readily. "Perchance you will be able to help us restore her. She continually murmurs your name, for you were the last person she saw in the burning building."

Together they went to the bedside of the sick girl. It was as Lothario had said. Her face was flushed with fever, her eyes rolled as one in delirium.

"Wilhelm, Wilhelm!" she murmured. "Where are you? I cannot find the flowers—they were the ones you gave her—and she is waiting for them!"

Over and over again she said it, uttering his name in tones of tenderness which betrayed her dovotion to him.

Wilhelm sank on his knees beside the couch and took the poor hot hands between his cool, strong ones.

"It is all right, Mignon my own," he said. "I am here and will never go away again, while you need me. Look at me, Mignon!"

Gradually the girl grew calmer, and after a while sank into a quiet slumber. The physician watching, clapped Wilhelm upon the shoulder.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed softly. "She sleeps naturally. She will get well!"

And she did. The next morning when she opened her eyes, it was to see Wilhelm bending over her. She smiled, then blushed and would have turned her face away, but the young man gently placed his arm beneath her head and kissed her. He realized at last that his own heart belonged to her, no less than hers to him.

From that moment with love and joy singing in her heart, her recovery was rapid. A few days later as they sat on a veranda overlooking the blue waters of the lake, Lothario joined them. But he was not clad in the plain garments of a minstrel. Instead, his rich attire proclaimed a nobleman.

In answer to their wondering gaze he said:

"My children, it is time you were told the story of my life. I am the Marquis of Cipriani and the owner of this estate. Fifteen years ago I suffered a great loss—so great that I lost my reason. I had an only child who was the light of my life. Her mother had died when she was an infant, and all my love centered upon my baby. She had grown large enough to run about and to prattle, when she was stolen by

some gipsies. I was frantic with grief, but started out in search of them. donning the garb of a minstrel.

"For fifteeen years I sought my child. Then one day I saw Mignon, and at once my heart was drawn to her. You know the rest. I believe this dear girl to be my long-lost daughter."

His voice shook with emotion as he produced a small, golden casket, and within it a little locket. It showed the picture of a mother and a child. The features of both strongly resembled those of Mignon. Then she in turn, with a cry, reached into the casket and drew forth a tiny prayer-book.

"Mine!" she cried.

It was, in fact, the book from which he had taught her to say her first prayers.

And springing up she was clasped in her father's arms.

Wilhelm also had arisen, and stood looking upon this scene with troubled feelings. But his own desires he put resolutely in the background.

"I congratulate you, sir," he said smiling, "upon finding your own again—the loveliest maiden in the world—and you too, Mignon, upon such a parent."

Then he turned as though to go.

"Wilhelm!" exclaimed the Marquis, extending his hand.

"I feel I must take my departure," persisted the young man; "I am, as you know, only a wandering student with my own way yet to make in the world. I shall not presume on my old friendship, though it has been very dear to me."

"Wilhelm!" said the Marquis again. "Unless my heart mistakes me, you love my daughter."

It was half a question, and Mignon turned her great dark eyes upon him, holding her breath for his reply.

"Love her?" cried the young man. "I worship her!"

The Marquis smiled and placed her hand within that of the student.

"Then take her," he said gently. "You rescued her from the gipsies. You bought her with a hundred ducats of gold. You saved her life from a fiery furnace. She is yours!"

PARSIFAL THE PURE

I

THERE is a beautiful legend of the Holy Grail which has to do with the last days of the Christ upon earth; and this legend is the golden thread upon which is hung our present story.

In the Bible story we read how, at the Last Supper, Christ took a cup and blessed the wine in it and gave it to his disciples to drink. The legend goes on to relate that Joseph of Arimathea, the man who provided a tomb for Christ, obtained the blessed cup of the sacrament, and that at the crucifixion he caught in it a few drops of blood from Christ's bleeding side.

Henceforth the Cup possessed the magical power of healing all wounds and sicknesses. It brought perfect peace to its possessor; and the mere sight of it was esteemed the greatest privilege on earth. But it was rarely seen of men. Spirited away by divine power, the Holy Grail —as it was called—was shown only on rare occasions and to the noblest and most self-sacrific-

ing among its seekers. And so its quest came to be the highest task a man could set himself, for it meant the conquering of his own baser nature first of all, and the putting aside of every selfish interest.

Such was the quest of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table, and it made them all the nobler and better, although the inspiring vision was granted only to two or three. At that time the Holy Grail had no fixed place, and men did not know where or how to seek it. So it is no wonder that so few ever succeeded in the quest.

Finally in another land a brave knight, Titurel by name, decided to devote his whole life to seeking the sacred Cup. Taking with him his son and a small but chosen body of knights, he set forth trusting to the mercy of Heaven to favor his search. Many days he led his little band across deserts, through valleys, and over stony mountain-sides. And as they went they aided every person who crossed their path; they forsook all worldly pride; and they spoke only in kindness and humility of spirit. Night and morning, also, they prayed that they might be led to the Holy Grail.

On and on they went, dusty and travel-worn and weary, but with the same brave hearts. Late one evening they stopped for the night in the shelter of a dense forest. They had traveled

all day and had eaten little, but after resting a brief while something seemed to urge them forward.

"Rise, my brave knights," said Titurel standing stiffly upon his feet. "Rise, and let us go still farther into this wood. I feel that it is the Divine will."

Without murmuring they once more resumed their march, and, wonderful to relate, the farther they went the less tired they grew. A strange feeling of rest and content came over them, until in a great wave of joy they all fell upon their knees and gave thanks. They felt that at last they were nearing the Holy Grail!

As they knelt a great light, like noonday, shone round them, and a voice said,

"Arise, ye blessed among mankind! For your labors are rewarded and it is given to you to guard the Holy Grail. Near unto you is a mountain which shall be called Mount Salvat, and thereupon must ye build a temple. And ye shall be called the Knights of the Holy Grail."

The voice ceased. The knights fell upon their faces in prayer and thanksgiving. When they arose the light had disappeared, but in each face was reflected a lofty purpose born of its glory.

The next morning they went their way to Mount Salvat and there built the temple. High were its walls with lofty arches and beautiful

windows, and its fame as the most imposing temple in all the world soon went abroad. And when it was finished and they held the solemn service of dedication, a light came and glowed steadily in the crypt. While all the knights fell upon their knees, Titurel drew near and lifted a veil. There in all its beauty shone the Holy Grail!

Then Titurel and the knights were filled with great joy, and they vowed eternal service to the sacred charge. They became, indeed, a sort of priesthood and forsook all other aims or desires. Daily they worshiped in the temple, and were fed from the holy altar. And if any among them became wounded or ill, the mystic fire which glowed about the Cup speedily restored him to health.

For many years they kept their charge with zealous faith. Titurel, their head, became an old man, and Amfortas his son was appointed chief guardian of the Grail in his stead.

Meanwhile, as you may suppose, many other knights were desirous of being admitted into the temple; but none save those who led pure and sincere lives was ever accepted. Among those who were rejected because they were unworthy was a powerful magician named Klingsor. When he failed to win entrance in the usual way he tried to bribe the keepers of the gates and

to make use of other base methods, but without success.

In his rage, Klingsor swore vengeance and devoted all his wicked arts to overthrowing the Temple of the Grail. He made a beautiful garden on the other side of the mountain, which he filled with flowers, fruits, music and dancing girls. By this means he deluded many knights who had come from afar earnestly seeking the Holy Grail, so that, almost at the goal, they forgot their quest and tarried idly in the gardens.

Hearing of Klingsor's wicked arts, Amfortas was filled with righteous anger. He determined to go forth and strike down the magician with the sacred Spear, which was his high badge of office. This Spear was second only to the Grail itself in value. It was the same that had pierced the Saviour's side while he was on the cross. It gave to its bearer the power of overcoming all his enemies, so long as he was true to the faith. But Amfortas though zealous was too confident of his own strength. Going over the mountain hastily in search of Klingsor, he grew tired and thirsty; so when he came to a shady grove of fruit trees by a splashing fountain, he did not recognize this as one of the wiles of the magician, but ate and drank, then threw himself down on the cool grass and fell asleep. The Spear was loosened from his grasp, in his slum-

ber, and he was only awakened by a keen, smarting pain in his side. He found that he had been wounded; and as he sprang to his feet he confronted Klingsor who was waving aloft the Spear in triumph.

"Go back to your temple!" sneered Klingsor; "and bid the next man be not weary so soon!"

In shame and sorrow Amfortas departed, knowing that he had sinned and could do nothing against the Spear now in the hands of the enemy. Earnestly he did penance in the temple and confessed his fault, but the wound in his side never healed. It gave him daily torment, and the sight of the Grail which had once brought healing seemed only to increase the pain.

It had been Amfortas' duty to uncover the Grail each day at sacrament, but so dire was his suffering that he came to do it less and less frequently. The knights were very sorrowful because of these things, and they sent far and wide for healing balsams, but all remedies were powerless. Long did Amfortas kneel before the altar praying in his pain, and seeking for a word of hope from above. At length one day an added radiance glowed about the Grail, and he heard a voice saying,

> By pity enlightened,
> My guileless one,—
> Wait thou for him
> Till my will is done!

Amfortas could not understand these words, but somehow his heart was lightened, and he thanked God that one day, be it near or far, he should find relief. The other Knights of the Grail also heard with joy of the strange message; for they did not doubt that it meant healing and peace.

For many days they waited patiently and prayerfully without receiving any further sign. Amfortas strove to sustain his courage, but it was a bitter test. Daily he tried the baths and also the balms which his knights often went to much peril to obtain for him; yet the wound still showed no signs of healing, and deep gloom settled down over the temple.

II

One day while the aged keeper of the gate was sitting, as was his wont, with his face toward the little lake which nestled in the valley, his eye was attracted by a wild swan which soared peacefully above the lake. Suddenly it turned sidewise with a wild flutter of pinions and began to fall toward the water. The keeper saw that it was wounded by an arrow, and he hastened down to the lake to see who had done the deed; for it was forbidden to harm any creature, great or small, within sight of the temple.

Just as he reached the bank, the swan fell at his feet and expired, while at the same moment a youth ran up to claim his prize. He was clothed in motley animal skins, but he was strong and well knit, and with that frank look about the eye which denotes both fearlessness and innocence.

"Shame, shame upon you, boy, for shooting the swan!" said the old man sternly.

"Why, what have I done?" answered the youth. "Do not men hunt birds and beasts? Methought it was a fine thing that I struck the bird so high."

"But you are now within holy ground, where 'tis sacrilege to harm any creature. And think what sorrow you have brought with your idle deed. This beautiful bird will soar in the clouds no more. It may have a mate, or perhaps little ones awaiting its coming. They will never see it again."

The boy stood with downcast eyes and troubled face. "Indeed, I never thought evil," he said. And seized by a sudden impulse he broke his bow across his knee and flung his arrows away.

"What is your name, boy?" asked the knight.

"I am Parsifal," he answered simply.

"Whence come you?"

"I do not know."

"Where go you?"

"I go to become a knight," answered the boy. "I have always wanted to be a knight."

"But do you not know that great things are expected of a knight? They must do other deeds than roaming about shooting harmless swans."

The boy flushed, but looked straight at the stern old man. "I know that a man must be brave and true," he said; "and that he must keep his heart pure. My father who died long ago was such a knight, and my mother has always taught me to be like him."

"But you will have many strong trials before you can become a knight. You may have to wander all over the world and endure many hardships."

"I am ready for them," answered the boy sturdily.

"Truly you are a guileless fellow," said the old keeper; "but I like your spirit. Would you like to witness a service in the temple and hear the choir-boys sing? Perchance you might like to be a choir-boy for awhile?"

"Nay, but I came to be a knight. Nathless I will hear the singing."

The boy said this so calmly, that the knight was half sorry he had given the invitation; for chances to obtain entrance to the service were

exceedingly rare. However, the word had been spoken and he would abide by it.

They cast the dead swan into the lake and went together up the hill. Service of the sacrament was just beginning in the temple as they entered its doors. High up in the organ loft the rolling waves of music poured forth, filling every arch of the lofty building. Then the sweet voices of boys were heard chanting the refrain to which Amfortas had set music:

> By pity enlightened,
> My guileless one,—
> Wait thou for him
> Till my will is done!

Parsifal plucked the old knight's sleeve. "What do they mean by that?" he asked.

"Hush. I do not know," replied the knight.

Parsifal thought it strange that they should sing words no one understood, but he kept silence and looked upon the solemn service with wide-open eyes.

The aged Titurel was present at the service. His days were almost numbered now, but he still had his couch conveyed into the presence of the beloved Grail when he felt strong enough. To-day he joined the other knights in urging his son Amfortas to uncover the Cup and serve the sacrament.

"Let me have the sacrament from out the blessed Cup once more before I die," said Titurel.

Amfortas shook his head and groaned aloud.

"Not yet, my father! I am unworthy to uncover the Grail!"

Nevertheless the feeble Titurel urged the point, and all the knights knelt with solemn upturned faces, until at last Amfortas went and unveiled the Cup and poured wine therefrom, so that all might partake. Then he fell to the floor with a shudder of pain. The old wound had broken open afresh. But Titurel and the other knights partook of the sacrament, while the choir-boys chanted responsively and the deep organ pipes thrilled all the lofty arches.

The old keeper of the gate went forward and partook with the rest, while the boy Parsifal stood spellbound behind a pillar and could make no meaning of what he saw.

At last the keeper came and led him forth again to the open air, and then the lad's tongue was loosed.

"I pray thee, why did the King fall to the floor as if in pain?" he asked.

"The wound in his side pained him," answered the keeper.

"Why doesn't it heal?"

"That is a long story. But the wound was made by the sacred Spear, and 'tis said that only the touch of that Spear again can make it well."

"Then why does he not go and lay hold of the Spear?"

"It is in a powerful magician's hands."

"Can no one take it from him?"

"No one has yet succeeded in the quest," answered the knight. "But, boy, how did you like the service of the Holy Grail?"

"I could make nothing of it," said Parsifal, turning as if to go.

"Could make nothing of it!" exclaimed the old knight. "Truly you would not be much of a choir-boy. But where are you going?"

"I go to seek the Spear that will heal the King," answered Parsifal.

The old knight let him go without further words. He even shook his head in some impatience.

"Truly a guileless youth," he said to himself. "A little knocking about in the world will not hurt him. He is too foolish to do us any good here. And as to being a *knight*—pish!"

But just then the closing words of the service came echoing through the windows, and caused the old man to start. He had heard again the mystic song,

By pity enlightened,
My guileless one!

III

Now Klingsor the magician had cast a spell over a poor woman so that she was obliged to obey him in all things. Usually she was old and wrinkled, and passed for a witch in the country-side. But when Klingsor waved his wand over her she became the most beautiful maiden ever seen. Kundry was her name, and she it was who had charge of the groves and flowers and music and dancing-girls, which had caused so many knights to turn aside before ever they reached the Temple of the Grail. Kundry, indeed, had caused Amfortas himself to sin, on the day he lost the sacred Spear.

But when the spell was removed from poor Kundry she always bitterly repented her misdeeds. She had been very sorry for Amfortas, in her wild way, and had herself brought balsam from distant lands to heal his wound, but without avail.

No sooner was Parsifal on his way in search of the sacred Spear, than Klingsor was on the alert. Once more he summoned Kundry and bade her prepare the same kind of a trap for Parsifal as had lured the knights aside. But Kundry hotly protested at this. She had seen the youth and greatly liked his open face and frankness. She rebelled against doing harm to one so harmless as he.

"Let him pass on his way," she pleaded. "He has done no evil and is too simple to find you unaided, and even if he did, he could not take the Spear from you."

"Do as I bid you!" replied the magician, angrily. "It is precisely because he *is* pure and innocent that I fear him. Such an one's coming has long been foretold."

So Kundry had nothing to do but sadly obey.

When Parsifal drew near, walking over the crest of the hill, the palace of Klingsor suddenly sank into the earth and vanished, leaving in its stead a lovely flower-garden. Presently Parsifal stopped and listened, for he heard strains of music.

"How sweet it sounds!" he said; "yet it seems to make the air heavy and uncomfortable. I wonder where it comes from?"

Louder grew the music, and with it came the sound of girls' voices. Just then he came to the entrance of the garden, where he paused spellbound. The flowers themselves were singing to him! Each flower was in the lovely tints of a rose, lily, pansy or carnation, and out of the centre of each blossom peeped the bright eyes and laughing face of a bewitching maiden.

"Come!" they sang to him; "come and rest by the fountains! Come, drink nectar, and let us sing to you while you rest in the shade!"

"Nay," said Parsifal, simply. "I like you all, and would gladly listen to your song; but I cannot tarry, for I am on an urgent errand."

"Come!" they pleaded; and the flowers seemed to weave in and out in a wonderful dance, nodding to him and beckoning him. "Come! Only a little while! Then you will start forth rested and make better speed."

Parsifal shook his head. "I cannot enter," he said, and turned to go, when another voice softer than the rest called his name.

"Parsifal, Parsifal!"

"Who called me?" he asked, turning about.

"I called thee, lad," said the sweet voice.

He looked whence it came, and saw a leafy bower opened wide, wherein sat a maiden fairer than ever heart could dream. It was Kundry, the ugly old witch, transformed by the power of the magician into this glorious vision.

"How do you know my name?" he asked, bluntly.

"I knew thy mother, lad, and thy father, too. Wouldst hear of them?"

"Yes, yes!" he cried eagerly. "Tell me of them!"

"Then come within the bower and rest awhile. Here thou canst listen to the music, and eat and drink and dance with these lovely flowers."

"Nay, but tell me now! Why should I pause

when I am not faint? No good deed was ever done by stopping on the way."

"Thou art a foolish youth," said the maiden. "Why art thou in so great haste?"

"I seek a magician," he answered, frankly; "a magician who has stolen the sacred Spear."

"Ah, I can tell thee of him!" she cried—an evil light lurking in her eyes. "Come, sit by my side, and I will tell not only of him but of thy father and mother."

Parsifal turned at this, but entered the garden slowly. He knew no reason why he should not come in, and yet a great force seemed holding him back. "But how can I go on my errand," he thought, "unless I find the way?"

"I would hear about my mother first," he said, seating himself by the maiden's side. "Is she well?"

"She is well, but has mourned sadly since thou didst go away. I saw her only a few days ago, and she sent thee her love and a kiss."

Here the witch leaned forward suddenly and printed a kiss upon his lips. It was intended to enchant him, but for once it failed of its effect. Parsifal sprang up as if stung by an asp.

"Amfortas! O Amfortas!" he cried. "I know it now! The spear-wound in your side! Ah, the anguish of it has come upon me also!"

"Thou art wrong," said the woman softly. "I have harmed thee not. Only stay!"

"Not another moment!" exclaimed Parsifal. "Your garden is evil and brings death to men's souls."

He turned to go, but the witch called aloud to the magician, for she knew her power was gone. And as she called, Parsifal saw a dark, dreadful figure before him that blocked his way.

"Stay!" commanded Klingsor waving the sacred Spear aloft. "Those who enter my garden cannot leave it so easily!"

"Stand aside!" cried Parsifal. "I have done no hurt, and I fear you not!"

"Thou wilt fear me when thou dost feel this spear-point! 'Tis the same that undid Amfortas."

"Ha! say you so? Then I have come to claim it in his name."

"Take it!" shouted the magician angrily. And he threw the weapon straight at Parsifal with terrific force.

But miracle of miracles! it stopped itself midway, and floated gently around about Parsifal's head. He grasped it reverently and made the sign of the cross.

"In this sign, perish!" he exclaimed. "Let all your wicked magic vanish from the face of the earth!"

As he uttered these words a tremendous crash was heard, followed by an earthquake. The garden, its flowers and music and running streams, was swallowed up in an instant, with all its inmates. Parsifal alone remained on solid ground.

He looked about him, but could see only a trackless forest with close spreading trees that shut out the blue sky and the light of the sun. He did not know which way to turn, or where stood the Temple of the Grail. But the sacred Spear was still in his hand, and its presence seemed to bring comfort. He knelt and prayed for guidance, and as if in answer, the words of the old knight came into his memory,

"You may have to wander all over the world and endure many hardships."

The young Parsifal wondered at this message. It seemed to come in answer to his prayer, and yet his spirit rose in questioning, "Why should I roam over the world when the King needs me so much, and his wound is not healed?"

But no other answer came, and no path led out of the forest. So he made no further questions but went his way trusting to Heaven to guide him, and the sacred Spear to protect him. When at last he reached the borders of the wood he found himself in a strange country.

IV

Thus it was that Parsifal began his pilgrimage. Long and hard it was, yet he did not falter nor complain. And always his hand was ready to help the poor or the suffering, while little children came to him gladly knowing they had found a friend.

Often his path led over steep rough mountains; again it lay in the burning sands of the desert; and again it was close to treacherous quicksands or yawning pits. But steadily he pressed forward, learning many things as he went, but never parting from any of his early purity or courage.

Slowly also, the great truth of the Holy Grail dawned upon him. He heard men speak of it with reverence and longing as the dearest treasure the earth possessed. Then he realized how lightly he had thrown away his own privilege through ignorance, and why the old knight at the gate had turned from him with impatience, as "guileless." With humility and prayer he resolved that he would always try to be worthy of this vision, in the hope that it would again come to him. And in moments like this, when his whole soul was stirred with anguish, he seemed to hear an inner voice saying,

"Courage! The Holy Grail is not far away!"

Thus it was that Parsifal began his pilgrimage

Thus years passed by, and at last Parsifal for true and heroic service was made a knight. Never was there a comelier. Strong and straight and graceful he stood, while his face was fair and pleasing and seemed continually to glow with an inner light. His eye was the very mirror of truth. He was, indeed, the image of that ancient ideal, a knight without fear and without reproach; and always he sought the deed that was most valorous and the duty that was most severe, hoping that his steps might be directed again to the Temple of the Grail.

One night he heard the bleating of a lamb that had lost its way. Parsifal was far from shelter, and the night was stormy, yet he did not hesitate. He turned aside and sought in the darkness until he had found the little wanderer, when he wrapped it in his cloak and carried it to its mother. When he again sought his road he could not find it because of the storm. He wandered on, and presently saw that he was in the midst of a dense forest. Somehow even in the night it seemed familiar to him, and his heart gave a great leap. He felt that the Holy Grail was close at hand!

Then a flash of lightning disclosed to him a little cavern, hollowed out of a rock, and he entered it for shelter during the night, with thankfulness.

The next morning the sun shone bright and warm, gilding the wet leaves of the forest with radiance. Parsifal followed a shining beam of gold straight through the forest—and there before his feet lay the lake where he had shot the swan so long ago. On the hill near by stood the Temple of the Grail.

Parsifal stuck the Spear upright in the soil and knelt in prayer and rejoicing that his long pilgrimage was at an end; then rose and took his steps toward the hill.

"I wonder if the old knight of the gates is still alive," he said to himself; "I should dearly like to see him again."

No sooner had he said this, than he saw an aged man tottering feebly along, and lo! it was the keeper himself. By his side walked a woman whom Parsifal seemed to remember, but could not quite. It was Kundry the former witch of the flower-garden. After this garden was destroyed she had been released from the magician's spell, and she was now carrying water and doing other menial tasks around the temple in the hope of atoning for her past wickednesses.

When the keeper saw the knight in splendid armor standing there motionless, he greeted him courteously and said:

"Good-morrow, Sir Knight? Do you come seeking the Temple of the Grail? Then know that you are even now on consecrated ground, where it is forbidden to come bearing arms or with helmet closed."

For answer Parsifal once more thrust his Spear into the earth, and laying aside his helmet knelt with face toward the temple. Then the old knight remembered him.

"It is the youth of the swan!" he exclaimed to Kundry. "And see what he has brought back with him! The sacred Spear! O happy day on which the Spear comes home!"

Then Parsifal rose to his feet, and seeing love and joy in the old man's face he opened his arms and the two embraced right gladly.

"All hail to thee, good friend!" cried Parsifal. "Long did I fear that I should never see thy face again."

"Dost thou remember me?" asked the keeper. "Long years have passed and much grief has bent my back, since the day I let thee go forth as guileless and crack-brained."

"As indeed I was," answered Parsifal, "but through failures and hardships and many trials the guileless one has been at last enlightened, even as they sang in that strange sweet song of the temple.

"But tell me," the young man continued, "is there not something changed about this holy place? Oft have I heard about it in my wanderings. Men told me that Mount Salvat was the abode of delight; that here the birds sang, the knights went hither and thither with joy upon their faces, and the very air was filled with the spring-time of gladness. Is it not so; or is it only an idle dream?"

"It *was* so," answered the old man sadly," but dark days have come upon Mount Salvat. For pain of his wound, Amfortas has ceased entirely to serve the sacrament from the sacred Cup, and therefore are all the knights sad in their hearts. They have betaken themselves to cells like monks. The aged Titurel has died because he could no longer behold the Grail; and I am only living on in penance waiting till I can join him."

"Nay, but all these things must not be!" said Parsifal. "Dost thou remember telling me, long ago, that the sacred Spear—*this* Spear!—would heal Amfortas of his wound? I set forth to seek it that very day. Come, let us take it into his presence!"

"Pray God the oracle may come true!" exclaimed the keeper joyfully. "And thou dost come at a good season, for it is the Good Friday service to-day, and Amfortas has promised to uncover the Holy Grail once again, be the cost

what it may. But before we go up, thou must rest and be cleansed at this spring; and I will procure a white robe for thee."

So Parsifal laved his face and his hands at the spring, while the old man went in haste for the white robe. And while he sat there, the woman came up timidly and knelt down and unfastened his sandals and washed his feet. Then Parsifal looked down and remembered her.

"Thou art Kundry," he said; " thou hast come a long hard way, even as I have come." He sprinkled her brow with a few drops of water from the spring. "I baptize thee into a new life," he said; " come with us this day to the temple."

The tears rained down glad Kundry's face; and as she knelt there, it was transformed again into the loveliness of the maiden of the flower-garden, but purer, sweeter, and of a radiance not of earth. She was redeemed!

Just then the soft chimes of the temple bells rang forth bidding them come to the service. The keeper returned with the garment which he put upon Parsifal; and the three went up the path to the gates, Parsifal in the centre, bearing the sacred Spear.

They had no sooner entered, than the procession of knights filed by, preceded by the choir-boys who sang of the Holy Grail. Last of all

came Amfortas, slowly and as if in great pain. He paused before the shrine and made as if to open it, while all the knights gathered about in reverent waiting.

Suddenly he paused, clasped his hands to his side and cried out:

"No! no! I cannot do it! Death is so near me, only let me die! slay me with your swords and choose another Guardian of the Grail! I cannot bear to unveil the Holy Cup! Kill me, kill me, I pray you!"

His brow was wet with agony and he writhed with pain, so that the knights drew back from him in terror.

Just then Parsifal drew near in his flowing white robe, bearing the Spear aloft.

"Peace, O Amfortas!" he said quietly. "Only one weapon will ease thee of that pain: it is the one that caused it."

And with the sacred Spear he touched the wound; and lo! it was healed in an instant, and Amfortas' agony was changed to rapture as he knelt before the altar.

"Thou art forgiven," Parsifal's voice went on; "forgiven to continue in thy service of the Grail. But nevermore shalt thou be its Guardian. The words of the oracle have come true:

By pity enlightened,
My guileless one,—
Wait thou for him
Till my will is done!

Then Parsifal went reverently to the shrine and uncovered it, while all the knights fell on their knees and prayed, and the ransomed Kundry fell prostrate and bathed the altar steps with her happy tears. He drew forth the Holy Grail and held it aloft, and instantly a ray of dazzling light fell from above and struck within the Cup, so that it glowed with glory which flooded all the temple. And down from the lofty dome fluttered a pure white dove which hovered lightly over his head. The knights saw and understood the sign: a new Guardian of the Grail was come to them. The temple had awakened to a higher service through the stainless life of Parsifal.

Let us leave them there, in that holy service before Easter, while the music rose and swelled triumphant, telling of victory over sin and death!

THE PROPHET

I

SOME three or four hundred years ago there prevailed in Europe what was called the feudal system. There were strong castles here and there, occupied by lords and barons who were laws unto themselves, and who held the neighboring villages under subjection. Although the barons were often tyrants, the villagers made the best of the bad bargain, for, after all, their overlords protected them against the roving bands of robbers who prowled about over the country.

In one such castle on the Meuse River, in Holland, dwelt a certain Count Oberthal, who held many acres of fine rich land under his control. Before the castle walls and across the drawbridge which led into the great yard of the castle passed a constant stream of traffic. There were mules and donkeys laden with grain; farmers driving cows and goats; wagons piled high with grain; women carrying baskets filled with butter and cheese; carts bearing kegs of wine; while scattered about were soldiers and sailors who wore the Count's colors. He was indeed a rich and prosperous lord, who gave allegiance to no king.

One of his retainers was a fair young peasant girl, Bertha by name, who on the summer's day when our story begins, was neglecting her tasks. She was day dreaming. Her thoughts were with the handsome, stalwart innkeeper of the neighboring shire of Leyden. John loved her quite as devotedly as she loved him, but had waited to obtain his mother's consent to their union. The mother it was who owned the inn, and he felt that she must be consulted before bringing another woman to help manage it.

What was Bertha's delight, therefore, upon looking up, to see John's mother herself approaching. She ran to meet her.

"A good morrow to you!" she said shyly.

"A good morrow to you, my dear," said the older woman pleasantly. "I come on an agreeable journey. My son has told me of his wishes" —Bertha blushed, smiled, and nodded—"and I am willing to give my consent. My hands are getting old and feeble. I need young ones to help me at the inn. See, here is a betrothal ring which John sent."

She paused and placed it upon the girl's willing finger.

"Oh, I am so happy!" said Bertha, child-like, and not trying to conceal her feelings. "Nothing remains now except to get the Count's consent. You know that, being outside his do-

mains, we must get his sanction. But that ought to be easy. Let us go to him."

"Yes, let us go to him," the other woman agreed, and then started at once for the castle gate, never doubting the success of their mission.

As they neared the castle, their attention was drawn to three strange-looking men who had just arrived. They claimed to be superior to any man or his laws, and to serve only God, as they told the crowds along the road, who stopped to gaze at them. They were Seditionists or Anabaptists, who were trying to set up a religious kingdom upon earth, so they said, but their sinister and ragged appearance belied their speech. Certainly they were foolish enough, to come preaching their strange doctrines right under the eaves of the Count's castle.

While some of the crowd jeered and others applauded their harangue, the Count himself appeared with a group of retainers.

"What is all this about?" he exclaimed. Then pointing to one of the three men, Jonas by name, he continued: "That fellow was a steward I had last year. I discharged him for thievery and bade him never to show his rascally face around here again. Begone all of you!"

And he ordered his soldiers to beat the three Seditionists with the flats of their swords.

After the tumult had subsided and the crowd

dispersed, Court Oberthal turned and saw the two women still lingering.

"What is it you want?" he asked in kinder tones.

"Seigneur," said Bertha timidly yet gaining courage as she went on, "I love John of Leyden and have promised to wed with him. This is his mother who has brought me his betrothal ring. Nothing remains to complete our happiness save your consent."

And she lifted her beautiful eyes to his face and looked charming indeed as she blushed and awaited his reply.

"What! give my consent to let so lovely a maiden leave my domain?" he exclaimed.

Bertha thought that he was but teasing, and stood silent. John's mother, Faith, however was uneasy. She liked not the bold way in which he eyed the girl.

"Seigneur," she said, "we be but humble folk and await your pleasure."

"Then if you await my pleasure, I say No!" said the Count. "I cannot let this girl go away."

Bertha and Faith, now thoroughly alarmed, threw themselves at his feet, but he turned roughly aside.

"Take these two women into the castle," he ordered, "and there let them be held for my further orders."

The two women were dragged, weeping, within while he strode away. But their cries had attracted the peasants again, who stood about uncertain what to do. The three Seditionists who still lurked near saw in the incident a further opportunity.

"See!" they said to the peasants, shaking their hands warningly at the frowning castle walls. "See the result of tyranny!"

II

Meanwhile as the day drew to a close, John was full of foreboding. His mother, Faith, had not returned though long since due, and lover-like he was anxious to hear tidings of his sweetheart.

But he was not allowed much time to mope, as there was a throng of peasants at the inn sitting around the tables making merry, and he was kept busy waiting upon them.

"Hey, John, bring us more beer!" cried one.

"John, wait on us next!" bawled another.

At this moment the three Seditionists entered the door.

"Who is this John you are shouting at?" inquired Jonas.

"Why, the innkeeper—there he is," said a peasant.

Jonas and his companions looking beheld a remarkably fine-looking man with high forehead, pleasant brown eyes, and soft, curling beard.

"Look!" said Jonas excitedly to Zacharias, a second Seditionist. "Whom does he remind you of?"

"Why, he is the image of David the King," rejoined the other. "You remember his picture in the Cathedral of Munster."

"The very same!" said Matthias, the third.

As they pondered over this strange resemblance, an idea was born in their minds. If they could persuade John to leave the inn and go with them, they would hail him as a prophet and tell the ignorant country-folk that here at last was the great leader sent from Heaven to found an earthly kingdom. The more they thought over this scheme, the better it looked. But first they must get John's consent. So they sat down in a quiet corner to await an opportunity to speak to him. It was not long in coming.

"Time to close up, friends," said the innkeeper presently. "Besides I hear a storm coming, so it would be wise to seek your homes before it breaks."

He made this excuse to clear the room, as he was anxious about his mother's delay. He would go in search of her, he told himself.

The villagers rose good-naturedly and departed, but the three plotters still lingered. John veiled his impatience and asked them what he could do for them.

"Come, my friend," said Jonas. "I see that something troubles you. What is it?"

"Well, if you must know," returned John abruptly, "my mother has been gone all day, and I cannot imagine what is keeping her. Perhaps it would not weigh so much on my mind if I hadn't had bad dreams two nights in succession."

"Tell us your dreams," said Jonas coaxingly. "We are dream interpreters."

"Why"—said John hesitatingly—"I dreamed that I was standing before the altar in a beautiful temple, and that everybody within the temple was bowing down before me."

"That was fine!" said Jonas glancing quickly around at his companions. "Why do you call that a bad dream?"

"Oh, but wait! While the people were bowing thus before me, they sang, 'Heaven has sent us a king!' As I stood there filled with pride, I saw a hand writing on the wall, 'Woe, woe to thee!' I drew my sword, and the Devil himself appeared and tried to drag me off the throne. There was a lot more to it, but I guess that was enough!"

"Oh, brother! You do not know how to interpret dreams," said Jonas. "It means that you are out of your true sphere here. You were born to reign over the multitude. Of course, you will have your troubles, but no kingdom is worth reigning over that is not worth fighting for.'"

With this, the other two plotters chimed in and at once began to tempt John to leave his tavern and cast in his lot with them.

"The peasants are a lot of fools ground down under the heels of tyrants," they said. "All we need is a leader—a man with a presence like yours can do anything!"

But John only shook his head.

"That all sounds very fine," he answered, "but you have come at the wrong time. Let me get my mother back safe and sound to the inn. Let me win the girl that I love—and I care not for your earthly kingdoms!"

Seeing that his mind was too full of his present problems to listen to them, the Seditionists reluctantly bade him good-night and departed.

"A bunch of queer fellows!" he said to himself. "Hello! What's the row?"

A considerable noise had manifested itself outside the tavern. John unbarred the door again and looked out. No sooner had he done

so, than with a cry Bertha rushed in and flung herself into his arms.

"Save me! hide me!" she cried.

"Good heavens! What has happened?" he asked anxiously.

"Your mother! The soldiers!—They are coming!"

The poor girl was so exhausted and frightened that she could say nothing more. While he endeavored to calm her, he glanced without. The galloping of horses approaching the inn confirmed her fears. Not waiting to question her further, he hastily concealed her behind a hanging, just as Oberthal himself dismounted and rushed in.

"You are harboring one of my servants!" he said. "Deliver her up to me instantly!"

"I am not your slave," retorted John looking at him with flashing eyes. "The woman you speak of is my promised wife, and is under my protection."

"We will see about that," answered the Count. "I was conveying her and another woman to Haarlem, when she escaped. But the other woman has not escaped—and she is your mother. Unless you instantly hand over this girl to me, your mother shall die!"

It was a terrible position for the innkeeper to be in, torn thus between the love for his

mother and for his betrothed. As he stood there silent, trying to get a grip on himself, Bertha herself answered the question by tearing the curtains apart and coming forward.

"You owe more to your mother than to me," she said quietly. "I will go."

Before John could interfere, the soldiers seized her and led her away. As he stood there, still dazed by the sudden turn of events, his mother, who had been released, entered. She placed her arms about him and tried to comfort him, but he shook her off gently.

"Go to your room, mother dear," he said, "I must be alone with my thoughts."

Sighing she obeyed, and he sank upon his knees and tried to pray. Against the all-powerful Count what could his single arm avail?

As if in answer he heard the strange chant of the three Seditionists, who were returning to the tavern. They had hidden outside and witnessed the tragedy. Now they rightly surmised that they would find John a willing tool. Before they had said six words he exclaimed:

"Yes, I will go with you! I need no throne, but I want revenge—revenge!"

And not even waiting to tell his mother farewell, he went away with them into the night.

III

The Anabaptists, as the plotters were generally called, soon began to gain many followers. It seemed as though the presence of John of Leyden was all that was needed to bring them success. While the other three men were of unprepossessing appearance, John looked and spoke as one inspired. And he resembled the church likeness of David so closely that his fellow conspirators boldly proclaimed him a prophet sent from God.

At first John paid no attention to these claims, but when he saw that the people were accepting him as an inspired leader, and that it made his task that much easier, he made no protest. Daily he assumed more and more the authority of a prophet, and recognized head of the movement. The other three men, forced to take orders from him, secretly grumbled but could not do anything to stem the tide of his popularity.

That winter the Anabaptists, now grown to a formidable army, encamped in the forest of Westphalia. They were besieging Munster, which was held by the father of the Count of Oberthal. John of Leyden was determined to seize the city, as he had reason to believe that Bertha was imprisoned there. His followers,

who worshipped him almost as god, fought under his banner like fanatics, and drove the enemy before them.

On one of their forays a crowd of prisoners was brought in, and among them one whom Jonas instantly recognized.

"Ha, Oberthal!" he exclaimed with a savage shout of glee. "You shall not escape me this time!"

Jonas had not forgotten that the Count had publicly accused him of stealing. Drawing his sword he made ready to strike him down, but others interfered.

"You cannot kill without consulting the Prophet," they shouted. "Take him before the Prophet!"

"Why should I consult the Prophet?" cried Jonas in a rage. "Vengeance is mine!"

"Who talks of private vengeance?" asked a stern voice, and John himself entered.

But it was a very different John from the modest innkeeper. Clad in rich robes, the long curling hair and brown beard made him look every inch a king or mighty prophet of old. Small wonder that the people bowed down to him. In his presence the insignificant Jonas seemed to shrivel up.

The Prophet—as we must style John—gave

Jonas no further attention but turned to the prisoner.

"Oberthal!" he exclaimed, his voice quivering with emotion.

"Yes, a very good friend of yours!" said Zacharias, one of the other ringleaders sneeringly.

"Leave us!" commanded the Prophet, and all the crowd departed, leaving John confronting his ancient enemy.

"So the tables are turned!" he said quietly.

"Yes," returned the Count; "I am in your power. But before you pass judgment, know that Bertha has suffered no harm. In order to escape me she jumped from a castle window into the sea—"

"Dead?" exclaimed John.

"No. I was touched with remorse and rescued her. Again she escaped and took refuge in Munster. I was on the way thither to rescue her and deliver her over to you, when your soldiers captured me."

"A likely story!" thought John to himself; but aloud he said: "Oberthal, her word shall decide your fate. We will bring you into her presence, as your hand was first raised against her."

When this decision was reported to the others they were very angry. They felt that this was

the time to make a stand against the Prophet, and so decided to take matters in their own hands. They told the people that John was treating with the enemy and was afraid to fight.

"He is a false prophet," they said. "Come, follow us, and Munster shall be taken."

Vain boast. No sooner had they charged upon the city, than its gates opened and a host of trained soldiery advanced upon them. They fled like sheep without a leader, despite the efforts of Jonas, Matthias, and Zacharias to rally them. Soon the rabble came surging around the doors of the Prophet's tent in great distress.

"Thou hast betrayed us!" they cried. "The enemy is upon us, and thou sittest idly by. Thou art no prophet!"

They shouted and waved their hands at him, and even threatened death. But John stood up before them calm and unafraid, waiting for a moment to speak. The dominant personality of the man at last awed them—then he raised his right arm and pointed his finger at them in scorn. The rabble shrank back as from a weapon.

"Fools!" he exclaimed. "Who led you into battle to-day? Not I! And yet you come whining back to me! Ye are justly punished by an offended God for your unseemly haste. Down on your knees and ask his forgiveness!"

"It is the voice of a man of God! We have sinned!" they said, and fell upon their knees.

It was not strange, therefore, that wielding such superhuman power over his followers John was able to rally them. The rabble changed to a fanatical but exultant army which in turn swept the soldiery before it, and the city of Munster soon fell into their hands.

IV

With the Prophet's rapid rise to power, a change for the worse took place within the man himself. He forgot his former simple life, forgot his mother and his sweetheart, and devoted himself to founding an earthly kingdom. He established a court at Munster and issued his commands like any king—nay more—he claimed divine authority and was thus superior to all kings.

Meanwhile, his followers proved quite as bad as those of the Count and other barons in former days, for they pillaged the country on all sides, carrying treasure into the city, and filling the whole country-side with fear.

Among the sufferers was Faith, John's mother. She did not suspect that the Prophet was her own son, as she had been told by the other conspirators that John had been murdered by the Prophet's orders. Neither they

nor he wanted her to suspect or claim kinship with him, as this would have upset his claim to divine origin.

The poor old woman was reduced to beggary and came into the public square of Munster asking for bread, at the very time when the Prophet's followers, flushed with victory, were shouting their loudest for him.

While she was thus begging, whom should she meet but Bertha. With a cry the two women rushed into each other's arms.

"Oh, my mother!" said Bertha. "How long I have sought you! Tell me, where is John?"

"Alas, John is no more!" sobbed the old woman. "The wicked Prophet has killed him."

"A curse upon the Prophet and all his Anabaptists!" exclaimed Bertha in her turn.

As they thus talked seeking to comfort each other and heaping maledictions upon the head of the supposed Prophet, whom neither had seen, that great man himself entered the cathedral in Munster, to be crowned. It was his day of victory. The people shouted and fell down before him, as before a god. As he beheld the crown held out to him, he had visions of founding an earthly empire greater than that of Charlemagne.

But just at this moment of supreme triumph, a discordant note was sounded. A poor woman

in rags had entered the cathedral and gazed upon the magnificent scene with wondering eyes. Then she rushed forward with outstretched arms and fell at the feet of the Prophet.

"My son!" she breathed.

For a moment there was silence. John clad in his robes of state looked down at her. His heart yearned for her, but he quickly pushed this human feeling aside. He claimed divine right. If he acknowledged kinship with this beggar woman, the crowd would jeer him as an impostor.

"Who is this woman?" he asked looking about him.

"Ah, John! I have looked for you everywhere. Do you not know me?" And she began to weep.

"The poor woman is mad," he said.

But already he bagan to detect murmurs of doubt among the fickle throng, and to strengthen his position still further, he determined upon a bold stroke. Turning to Jonas and the rest he tore apart the rich robes of state and bared his naked breast.

"I am a prophet sent from God!" he cried slowly and impressively so that the woman at his feet could not mistake his meaning. "As a prophet I am above all earthly ties. If this

poor woman—God pity her!—should again claim me as her son, do ye strike me to the heart with your swords!"

The ready weapons flashed, and Faith looking up caught his eye and instantly understood. There must be nothing further between them.

"I was misaken," she said humbly. "My old eyes have deceived me. I have no son. He is dead."

V

Foiled of their prey at the coronation, Jonas and the other two conspirators took counsel together. It would never do to have John all-powerful over them. They had intended to use him as a tool. Now they began plotting to deliver him over to the Emperor, who was marching against Munster with a large army.

Meanwhile, John touched with remorse at having had to disown his mother, sent for her to attend him in a private room of the palace. As she entered he dismissed the servants and then ran to her.

"Mother, forgive me!" he begged.

"Nay, you must, instead, ask forgiveness of a higher power," she answered. "I saw some strange message in your eyes, and disowned you. Now I cannot claim you as my son again when

you come to me like this. Why have you done this thing?"

"It was from love of Bertha," he confessed. "My wrongs drove me to take up arms."

"But not content, you are trying to wield the powers of God himself, without his justice. The whole country cries out against you. Even Bertha denounces your name."

"Bertha! Where is she?"

"She is here!" said a voice, and Bertha herself, disguised as a pilgrim, entered the room.

"I seek the Prophet," she said. "I was told he was here."

Bertha, maddened by her country's wrongs, had determined to take vengeance into her own hands. She had made her way into the powder vault of the castle and there set fire to a slow-burning fuse. Now she sought out the Prophet with intent to kill him and then herself.

"I seek the Prophet," she repeated.

"I am the Prophet," replied John quietly.

"The Prophet—thou? Why, I have sworn to kill thee. Already this place is doomed. A slow fire eats its way to the powder magazine. Why did I not know this sooner?"

John stood helpless before the wild light in her eyes. He reproached himself bitterly that he had neglected his love for his ambition. Now he realized it was too late, for with a wild cry

the demented girl thrust a dagger into her heart and fell dead at his feet.

Horror-stricken he sought to raise her up. Then he turned and looked at his mother.

"It is all over," he said. "The doom is upon us. Already the Emperor's guard begins to hammer at our gates. The conspirators plot to deliver me into his hands. But I shall defend myself no longer. God's judgment is upon me."

Turning he called the guard in a loud voice:

"Bid the servants prepare the coronation feast at once," he said, "and summon all the court to the palace hall."

A few minutes later when he entered the hall, none knew the tumult in his heart. He greeted the three arch-conspirators and their men who clustered about him with lying words of friendship. He called for wine and they toasted the new dynasty.

While the felicitation was at its height none noticed the wisps of smoke which began to curl about the windows. Their attention was directed to the woman who had interrupted the coronation scene, and who now entered unbidden and made her way to the head of the table where her son sat.

"Thy mother?" asked Jonas jeeringly.

"Ay, does she claim kin with thee again?" mocked Matthias.

"Yes—it is my mother," he replied sternly looking them in the face.

"My son!" she said happily. "I have come to die with thee!"

Then as the conspirators sprang up with drawn swords, a rumble then a mighty crash was heard. The walls heaved and rocked, and fell in upon them all.

The smoking ruins, a tomb of the Prophet and his ambitious desires, were all that confronted the Emperor's victorious army.

THE RHINE-GOLD[1]

I

HUNDREDS of years ago in a wonderful time called the dawn of the world there lived many strange beings which do not now exist. Gods and goddesses dwelt in the clouds that hovered about the mountain peaks. Great untamed giants roamed amid the valleys. Swarthy, mis-shapen dwarfs, called Nibelungs, toiled in the caves of the underworld heaping up treasures of gold and silver which never did any one any good. Ugly dragons crawled about on the earth; while beautiful water-nymphs lived in the rivers and seas. Lastly there were heroes and savage men who struggled together for the mastery in that far-off day when the world was in the making.

How the end came to all these strange things, and how the reign of the gods finally ceased, will be set down in this fourfold story I am about to tell you.

In the clear depths of the river Rhine, in Germany, once dwelt three water-nymphs—lovely maidens who were very like other maidens, except that they passed their whole lives under the

[1]This story and the three succeeding ones form a continuous narrative, "The Nibelungen Ring," or "The Ring of the Curse."

water and could not be seen by ordinary eyes. Fair were they in face, and graceful in form. Their eyes beamed gladness, for they had never known sorrow; while their long golden hair floated about them like a garment, or tossed upon the wave-crest as they played some merry game of hide-and-seek amid the grottoes of their watery world. They were called the Rhine-Daughters, and thus in frolicsome play did they spend their days—free from all care save one. It was this care and the sorrow following close upon it that caused the present story to be told.

Upon one of the highest rocks, deep down in the bed of the Rhine, was stored a great lump of pure gold, brighter and more dazzling than any other treasure ever known. It was also more wonderful than any other gold, because it contained the power of making its owner master of all the world. This treasure had lain undisturbed in the river's bed for so long that it had come to be known as the Rhine-Gold. It was watched over by the Rhine-Daughters, in whose care their father had left it. This was their sole duty—to keep guard night and day lest some thief should come and steal the priceless treasure.

One bright morning the maidens seemed unusually merry. They darted in and out the caverns with a speed which left the flying-fish far

behind. They laughed and chattered and sang, but glancing from time to time up at the precious Rhine-Gold, to see if it still glittered upon its protecting crag.

Presently their happy noise at play attracted a passer-by, who clambered upon one of the jutting rocks to see what it was all about. The newcomer stood in the greatest contrast to the three laughing girls. He was a dwarf, little and ugly and crooked, with a humped back and long, claw-like fingers to match the eager, grasping look in his small eyes. He was Alberich, of the race of the Nibelungs—the earth-dwarfs who dug for treasure in the underground caverns, and hammered and toiled without ceasing for the gold that never did them any good.

"Ho, ho!" he exclaimed to the maidens. "A fair morning to you!"

The nymphs started in alarm at the harsh, croaking voice. Nor did their first sight of the visitor reassure them. But they replied, civilly enough,

"A fair morning to you, sir!"

Then one of them darted swiftly upward, singing as she went:

Guard well the Gold;
'Twas just such a foe
Our father foretold.

Nevertheless Alberich had paid no attention to the Gold, so pleased was he by the nymphs and their gambols. And they in turn, losing their fear of the uncouth monster, and willing to tease him, asked him to catch them in their game of hide-and-seek. This he tried to do; but blinded by the unusual light, and stumbling awkwardly over the rocks, he could never keep up with their fairy-like antics. First one and then another would come near him or ascend the rocks, but it was always just beyond his reach. Finally their laughter and teasing made him angry, and he stopped short, refusing to be made sport of any longer.

Just then a ray of sunlight filtered down through the water and struck the Rhine-Gold. Instantly it glowed as though it were a mass of flame, reflecting a hundred shafts of light where one had smitten it. The whole river-bed was illuminated by the glorious rays.

The astonished dwarf looked toward the source of this splendor, and what he saw made his small eyes fairly bulge out with greed. Yet he concealed his amazement and waited to learn something about this splendid treasure without betraying his own interest. Fortune favored him. His unspoken question was answered by the Rhine-maidens who surged upward with a

glad cry of "The Rhine-Gold! The Rhine-Gold!"

"What is this Rhine-Gold you are talking about?" asked the dwarf with a great show of indifference.

"What! Haven't you ever heard of the wonderful Rhine-Gold?" asked one of the maidens thoughtlessly. "We supposed it was famed over all the world."

"But I dwell in the under-world and hear not the things which are spoken among men. Tell me of it, I pray."

Then the maiden forgot her father's warning to guard the treasure closely. She also felt nothing but contempt for this awkward little man from whom they could so easily escape. She told the secret of the Gold in the words of a song:

The realm of the world
To him shall it bring,
Who out of this Gold
Shall fashion a Ring
Of magical power untold

"Hum! Say you so?" said the dwarf, keeping his excitement down by a powerful effort, though his finger-nails fairly clawed into the flesh. "If your metal is as fine as all that, why doesn't some one lay hands upon it and do all these great things?"

"Sister, sister! be careful!" said another of the nymphs.

But the first only laughed and replied, "What can this silly old fellow do? Let us have some more fun teasing him!"

Then the third maiden floated gracefully near. "Why doesn't some one seize the Gold?" she repeated. " 'Tis because no one has yet been able to pay the price."

"What is the price?"

"This is it," she answered. "Listen:"

He who forswears the might of love,
And all its pleasures manifold,
He only has the magic art
To mould the ring from out the gold.

"Pish! a pretty story you are telling me!" said the dwarf. "As though a little matter like doing without love should make a person master of the world!"

He made a great show of scorn while he said these words, but all the time he was edging quietly nearer the treasure.

"But love is the greatest thing in the world!" said the first maiden. "No one can do anything without its wonderful aid. Why, even you—poor old fellow!—would not dare forswear it."

"*I* would not dare forswear it—eh?" exclaimed the dwarf with a snap of his fingers and

a wild laugh of triumph. "*Love*, forsooth! What is love to me, when gold is in question? Hark you, Rhine-maidens! I renounce love forever! Be my witness!"

And he sprang rapidly forward, before the nymphs could prevent him, clambered up the jagged rock and seized the coveted treasure.

"Our Rhine-Gold! Our Rhine-Gold!" shrieked the maidens. But it was too late: already he had disappeared in one of the clefts of rock leading to his cavernous home, and though they darted after him they could not find him in the dark depths. Only his mocking laugh came back to them.

"Ho, ho! *Love!* When all the world shall be mine!"

II

Now we have already seen that the nymphs and the dwarfs formed only a part of the strange world, so long ago. At the very time when Alberich was stealing the Gold and preparing to make the Ring of Power down under the earth, there was an unusual happening in the home of the gods far up on the mountains.

For a long time Wotan, the greatest of the gods, had desired a palace large enough to contain his kingly court. But he could find no one

strong enough to build it, until on a day two giants from the valleys below came into his presence. Large were they of shoulder and thigh, many times larger than ordinary men.

"We have come to build your palace," they said.

"Who are ye?" asked Wotan, looking piercingly at them with his single eye.

"I am Fafner, the frost-giant," answered one. "I can rend all these rocks asunder and build your palace in a single night, with the aid of my brother Fasolt, here."

Wotan was overjoyed to find some one who would undertake his cherished plan.

"What payment do you desire for this service?" he asked.

"You must give me the hand of your beautiful sister, Freia," answered Fafner.

Wotan frowned. He desired the palace above all things, just then, for it would enforce his visible rule over the world. But Freia was his favorite sister. Moreover, it was she who was the goddess of youth and beauty and who tended the tree of golden apples which kept the gods always young.

While Wotan was frowning and pondering to himself, his brother Loki whispered in his ear,

"Let them build the palace. We shall find another way out of the trade."

Now Loki, god of fire, was the craftiest of all the gods. So when Wotan heard his whispered advice his brow cleared, and he looked at the giants.

"So be it!" he commanded. "Build me the castle 'gainst another sunrise. It shall be Walhalla—the supreme home of gods and men."

The giants bowed and went their way. Presently the sound of mighty blows was heard, and terrific crashes as of the bursting asunder of rocks. All that day and night the tumult continued, while the earth shook to its very foundations.

The next morning the rising sun lit up a splendid spectacle. There stood Walhalla, magnificent home of the gods, upon the crest of a towering cliff. Its white walls gleamed and glistened. Its towers and buttresses were built of stones so large that they seemed placed for all eternity; yet the whole mass appeared as light and graceful as a fairy vision.

"Beautiful! Wonderful!" cried the gods and goddesses in rapture.

"Let us take up our abode in our new home!" said Wotan, with the delight of a schoolboy.

But just then the two giants appeared clad in their shaggy skins of slain animals.

"Hold!" said Fafner. "First give us in payment the goddess Freia as you promised us."

"That I cannot do," replied Wotan. "You must think of some other way for me to reward you."

"Not so!" exclaimed the giants angrily, their hoarse voices making all the mountain quiver. "Give us the maiden, as you agreed, else we shall tear down the palace quicker than we built it."

And they placed themselves on each side of the trembling Freia.

"Touch her not!" cried two gods, as they sprang forth to protect their sister. "Do you not know," continued one, "that I am Thor, god of thunder, and that with one blow of my hammer I can crush you both?"

And he raised his hammer threateningly. But now the great Wotan interposed in his turn.

"Restrain your fury!" he commanded, stretching forth the dread Spear of Authority between the giants and the gods. "By this Spear the word of Wotan cannot be broken; and unless Fasolt and Fafner agree to accept other reward, they must e'en take our sister with them to the regions of frost."

At this command the contending ones fell back, but there arose a low cry of fear from the lovely Freia and a deep lamentation from the other gods. For how could they live without

their sweet sister, she who gave them the apples of eternal youth?

Meanwhile Wotan had been casting his eyes impatiently from side to side. He was looking for his crafty counselor, Loki, and wondering why he did not appear with his aid; since he it was who had promised to find a way out of the bargain.

"Come, decide!" said the giants, again stepping forward.

"Only one hour more," pleaded Wotan. "I must confer with my counselor who is just now absent."

"Only one hour, then," replied the giants.

"Send out messengers in search of Loki, god of fire," commanded Wotan. "Let him be summoned instantly."

But at this moment who should appear but Loki himself, walking in unconcernedly and looking about in feigned surprise as though he were the last person any one would wish to see.

"Good-morrow, all!" he said, airily. "That is a beautiful castle I see upon yon mountain height. I have just been examining it from every side, and upon my word it would defy even my arts to destroy it!"

"Yes, yes," replied Wotan, impatiently, beginning to be a little ashamed of his fine Walhalla. "But that is not the point, just now.

These giants demand our sister Freia as their reward; and you remember you promised to find a substitute for her."

The sly Loki arched his eyebrow in mock surprise.

"A substitute for *her!*" he exclaimed. "Why how could that be possible? I should think that Fasolt and Fafner would rather have her than all the treasures in the world. Is she not the goddess of youth and beauty?"

At this the two gods Thor and Fro raised their weapons in great anger, and would have fallen upon Loki, had not Wotan restrained them. He knew the cunning of the latter, and was persuaded that Loki had found a plan.

"Yes," proceeded Loki as calmly as though there had been no interruption, "all the riches in the world would not take the place of Freia. Even the far-famed Rhine-Gold would hardly answer. And speaking of the Rhine-Gold, do you know that I have just heard a strange story.

"While passing along the banks of the Rhine, I became aware of the sound of pitiful weeping and wailing. I turned me about to see whence the doleful sound came, and I beheld the three Rhine-Daughters. They were no longer joyous and care-free as was their wont, but they were beating their breasts and tearing their hair while

they cried, 'Our Rhine-Gold! Our Rhine-Gold! Stolen! Stolen!' "

"What! Have they suffered the Rhine-Gold to be stolen?" asked Wotan in alarm.

" 'Tis as they said; for I stopped and questioned them. They said that the dwarf Alberich had seized upon the treasure and fled away to his earth-caverns, where he was even now making the magic Ring of Power. He has set himself up as King of the Nibelungs, and he purposes to rule the whole world."

The giants Fafner and Fasolt leaned eagerly forward and drank in every word of Loki's story —as indeed he had intended they should.

"Ah! that would be a prize worth having!" they exclaimed, rubbing their huge hands. "Mighty Wotan, if thou wilt wrest this treasure from the Nibelung and give it to us, we will release the goddess."

But Wotan again grew disturbed and silent. He knew that the Gold rightfully belonged to the Rhine-Daughters, and that it would prove a danger even to the gods themselves, unless it were returned. The giants saw their advantage and followed it up.

"Decide for yourselves," they said, laying bold hands upon Freia. "Our work is done and we claim the reward. Either this maiden or the

Rhine-Gold. And until you decide, she must follow us to the frost-land."

And unmindful of her cries of distress the giants bore Freia away, across the cliffs and down the mountain-side, the gods standing powerless to prevent.

As they stood gazing in dismay a thin mist arose from the valleys, and it seemed to touch all the gods with blight, as it were a frost. For the goddess of youth and beauty was gone, and old age had already begun to lay hand upon those that remained.

"Come, this will never do!" exclaimed Loki in jeering tones. "Will you stand in your tracks and let old age blight you?"

And then he began to taunt each of the gods separately, as was his wont.

"Look!" cried Fricka, wife of Wotan, "the golden apples even now are withering. Wotan, husband, behold thy doom! See how thy compact hath wrought ruin and wreck for us all!"

Wotan started up, fired by a sudden resolution.

"Up, Loki!" he commanded. "Follow me. We must fare to the caverns of night and seize upon this Gold."

"And then—?" asked Loki. "The Rhine-Daughters implored thine aid. Wilt thou restore it to them?"

"'Tis idle talk," retorted Wotan moodily. "Freia the goddess of youth and beauty must be ransomed, else we shall all perish."

"Then let us hence," said Loki, who had gained the point at which he had aimed from the outset. "Let us hence. I know a cleft in the rock, which serves as a chimney for the Nibelung's forge fires. Perchance he is even now hammering out the Ring of Power. Come, let us descend into his cavernous dwelling."

So saying the god of fire wrapped his mantle about him and set forth, closely followed by Wotan with his dread Spear of Authority.

III

As two simple wayfarers they traveled down the rocky chasm—down, down, down, and still down, while the hammering from the forges grew louder and the sulphurous smoke came curling up more and more thickly, till it would have suffocated any one but a god.

At last they emerged into a huge cave, around which hurried hundreds of queer little people, each as ugly and crooked and dirty as Alberich. They were blowing the fires, pounding away upon huge masses of metal, or scurrying about with arm-loads of gold, silver, and precious stones.

Just then the two wayfarers heard a quarreling in a side passage of the cave, when in came Alberich himself dragging another dwarf shrieking, by the ear. It was Mime, his own brother, but that made no difference with Alberich.

"Where is the helmet, you rogue?" he said. "It shall not be well with your skin if you don't give it up."

"Mercy, mercy!" howled Mime, the tears making little furrows down his dirty face. "I haven't got it done yet."

"Yes, you have! What is that you are trying to hide in your hands? Give it to me, I say!"

And Alberich seized the object which Mime had just dropped in terror.

"Ah! just as I thought!" continued the stronger brother. "Here is the magic helmet all complete; and this sly knave thought to keep it for himself. But I shall pay him for his treachery!

"Hark you, rascals!" he continued, turning to all the other dwarfs. "I am your king. Ye must henceforth serve me alone, and pile up all your treasure in the royal vaults. I have this day obtained the powers of magic which make you my servants. At this moment you see me not; but I shall make myself felt among you, I promise you!"

And with this speech he clapped the helmet upon his head and instantly vanished. But in his stead there came a pillar of mist, and out of the mist came his voice sternly commanding them to obey. Then the sharp lashes of a whip were heard right and left; and Mime fell groaning to the ground while the others retreated in terror, seemingly driven along a narrow way on the far side of the cavern. Alberich was beginning his reign with a vengeance!

Meanwhile, the two celestial visitors had stood unnoticed in a side passage. While they debated as to the best means of making their presence known, Alberich came back in his true shape, carrying the helmet in his hand, fondling the Ring upon his finger and chuckling with glee. Then he espied the two gods, and his brow wrinkled darkly.

"Why come you to my caverns?" he demanded. "Know you not that I am king here, and that strangers are not welcome?"

"We have but come to see some of the marvels of which we have heard so much," said Wotan pacifically.

"Humph!" said Alberich. "You look quiet enough, but I think I know you both. Yet I fear you not, whether gods or men; for *I* am master here."

"And what if we are indeed gods, dear Alberich?" said Loki, taking off his mantle. "See, I am the god of fire and your best friend. Do I not keep all your forges going?"

"Yes, that may be true," retorted Alberich. "But for all that I fear neither you nor Wotan the mighty. With this Ring made from the Rhine-Gold I can defy you all."

Alberich's accustomed low cunning had vanished before his sudden access of power. He was no match for the crafty god Loki.

"Oh, what a beautiful ring!" exclaimed the latter, bending forward admiringly. "Is it really made from the far-famed Rhine-Gold?"

"It is," said Alberich, swelling up. "I made it myself, and its possession gives me everything in the whole world except love."

"But some people think that love is the chief thing," said Loki.

"Pooh! that's because they haven't the gold I have. The two do not go together anyway, and never will. As for me, give me gold and power." And he kissed the Ring.

"But what if some one stole the Ring while you slept," persisted Loki.

"They couldn't," retorted the dwarf quickly. "See this helmet? That silly brother of mine yonder in the corner has just made it for me out of some more of this fine Rhine-Gold. With it

I can change myself into any form I choose, and defy the slyest of robbers."

"Oh, that cannot be!" replied Loki. "Only the gods can do such things. Unless I saw such a marvel with my own eyes, I never would believe it."

Alberich looked with scorn upon this doubting fellow; then willing to prove his boast, he put the helmet upon his head and muttered a few words. Instantly he was gone, and in his stead a huge serpent came wriggling along the floor, stretching its hideous jaws toward Wotan and Loki. The latter fled in pretended terror, while Wotan laughed calmly. The snake then disappeared, and the dwarf once more stood before them.

"*Now* do you doubt my power?" he asked proudly.

"Oh, it was wonderful!" exclaimed Loki, rolling his eyes. "I couldn't have believed it possible! But I should think it would be a great deal harder to turn yourself into something small?"

"Not at all," replied the Nibelung. "Watch this!" and before the gods were aware he was gone again. They looked high and low, and there among the small stones a toad came hopping toward them.

"Quick, put your foot on him!" exclaimed Loki.

Wotan put his foot upon the toad, and instantly it was gone, and in its place Alberich lay struggling vainly to get out.

"Let me up! You are crushing me!" screamed the dwarf.

"Not until you give us every bit of the Rhine-Gold, the helmet and the Ring," said Wotan.

"You can have all but the helmet and the Ring; and there's a lot of it—beautiful Gold!" whined Alberich.

"No, *all* of it!" said Wotan.

"You can have the helmet, too. Ough! you're smashing me!"

"The Ring and *all,* I tell you! Here, Loki, bind him with that rope!"

"Then take the Gold, the helmet and the Ring! Only let me live," cried the dwarf despairingly.

They bound him, and let him up. As soon as he could catch his breath, he continued,

"Take the Ring and *all!* But listen well to what I say. My curse rests upon it forever. Cursed be he who owns it, whether eating or sleeping or waking. Cursed be he and all his, whether god or devil. Sorrow and unhappiness shall go with this Gold through all the ends of the earth!"

IV

Notwithstanding this dread curse, the gods seized the Ring from off his finger and lost no time in making off with the treasure, leaving the dwarf groveling upon the floor and muttering fierce words against them. All their care now was to ransom their sister and drive away the mists of old age.

On their way up the mountain height they met the two giants bearing away the struggling Freia in their clutches.

"Hold!" commanded Wotan; "bear her no farther. We have brought the Gold to ransom her."

"Is it the far-famed Rhine-Gold?" asked Fafner.

"See for yourselves!" said Loki, casting the glittering heap upon the earth. "In all the world ye will not find its like."

The giants gazed greedily upon the hoard, and drew near to parley.

" 'Tis indeed a wonderful treasure," they said; "but the mass must equal in height and breadth the stature of this comely goddess."

"So be it," answered Wotan, and he commanded that staves be set upright in the ground and that the Gold be heaped between them. Thor and Fro and others of the gods had now arrived upon the scene—all overjoyed at the

prospect of Freia's release; for already the blighting mist was beginning to lift, though it yet concealed the fair towers of Walhalla. Meanwhile, Loki had been careful to withhold the Ring and the helmet from the rest of the hoard, which was now quickly heaped up between the upright staves.

At last, just as the Gold was exhausted, the pile rose above the top of Freia's head.

"Here, take the treasure," said Wotan, "and release our sister unto us."

"Nay, not so," said Fafner. "I see a hole in the heap, and through it gleams the goddess' hair brighter than any gold. You must fill the hole. Cast on the helmet which yonder Loki is bearing."

Wotan could scarce restrain his rage at this rude bartering of his sister. While the impetuous Thor fingered his mighty hammer nervously. But Wotan saw it was useless to refuse. He made a sign of command to the unwilling Loki, and the latter cast the helmet on the heap.

Fafner again walked around it looking closely on every side.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Here is just one more little crack. But through it I can see the gleam of the goddess' lovely eyes. You must place the Ring here to make the ransom complete."

"Never!" cried Wotan furiously.

"Very well then. We shall be forced to take the goddess with us."

And once more Fasolt laid his rude hands upon the shrinking maiden.

Thereupon a great tumult began. The voices of the gods rose in entreaty to Wotan to give up the Ring and save their sister and themselves. Thor sprang forward with uplifted hammer, while the hoarse voices of the giants bade defiance to them all. Again the dread mist crept up from the valleys, and darkness descended from the clouds. Still Wotan remained defiant. He was turning away in anger from the tumult, when out of a cleft in the rock a weird bluish light broke forth, and there emerged a woman of dignified and noble mien. Her long, black hair swept upon the ground, and her flowing robe seemed made of all the leaves and growing things of the soil. She was Erda, the spirit of Mother-Earth, gifted with wisdom and foresight such as was not given even to the gods themselves.

Erda stretched her hand out warningly toward Wotan.

"Yield, O Wotan!" she cried. "Escape the curse of the Ring, and all the hopeless woe it entails!"

"Who art thou, boding spirit?" demanded Wotan.

And in a chanting voice came back the reply:

All that was I know,
All that is I know,
All that ever shall be done,
This as well I know.

Erda the name I bear,
The Fates my daughters are,
Danger threatens dire,
This has drawn me near.

Harken! harken! harken!
All that is shall end.
Heed ye well, ere dawn of doom,—
Beware the cursed Ring!

As the chant ended, the bluish light died away and with it vanished the warning figure.

"O stay, dread spirit!" cried Wotan. "More would I learn!"

But only silence answered him; and after gazing into the darkness in anxious thought, he turned suddenly and approached the giants.

"Here is the Ring," said he sternly, drawing it from his finger and placing it upon the heap. "Begone, and leave us our sister! But a curse has fallen upon the Gold."

And so it proved. The gods themselves were witness of the first-fruits of the curse. For as the two giants fell greedily to work gathering up the treasure, a dispute arose. Fasolt claimed

that Fafner was taking more than his rightful share. They came to blows over it, when Fafner smote Fasolt to the ground with a blow so heavy that it killed him. Then the victor, unmindful of his deed, hastily gathered up all the wealth and departed, while the gods stood around silent and amazed that the curse should descend so swiftly. And Wotan foresaw in this tragic moment the awful doom which was one day to descend upon them all, because the Gold had not been restored to the Rhine-Daughters.

But his gloomy thoughts were broken just then by a mighty crash, like a peal of thunder. There upon the cliff leading to the beautiful new palace which had cost so much, stood Thor wielding his hammer upon the encircling clouds. Flashes of lightning burst forth. The clouds and mist rolled away revealing Walhalla in all its splendor; while from their feet, in dazzling radiance, gleamed a rainbow-bridge leading across the chasm to its portals.

"Come! let us go over to our new home!" said Wotan, taking his wife Fricka by the hand.

And followed by the laughing gods and goddesses, who surrounded Freia, fairest of the group, they went across the rainbow-bridge and entered the stately halls of Walhalla.

The setting sun shone brightly on the scene. The clouds had melted away into blue sky, leav-

ing a soft radiance which seemed to encircle their new home in a halo of delight. The evening fragrance of the valleys came up to them redolent with the springtime of growing things. As they trod the shining pathway the jests and merriment of the gods showed their gladness in this new home that had been made for them at so great a cost.

Still Wotan was not happy. He had decided seemingly for the best; but as he crossed the arching bridge he heard voices from the valley far beneath him, rising like the tones of conscience or the warnings of fate. It was the mournful song of the Rhine-Daughters:

Rhine-Gold! purest Gold!
Rhine-Gold! purest Gold!
How fair thy gleam,
Thy wealth untold!
But now thy rays
Light not the stream;
Ah! give them back—
Give back the gleam.
Rhine-Gold!

THE WAR MAIDENS

I

THE new home of the gods proved to be as beautiful within as it had appeared without. When they had all crossed the arching rainbow-bridge, loud shouts of joy and admiration arose; for it was the most splendid palace that gods or mortals could ever imagine. Long porticos and galleries with huge sculptured pillars ran in every direction, leading to cool fruit arbors, or open courts where silvery fountains splashed. Great rooms opened up with ceilings so high that they seemed to take in the sky itself. The spacious floors were paved with burnished gold, and the walls set with polished stone and fine jewels, so that they blazed with light as bright as the noonday.

On every side of the palace were smooth greenswards, and groves of stately trees. And in the midst of the largest grove of all grew the wonderful tree bearing apples of gold from which Freia fed all the divine family to make them immortal.

For a long time the gods and goddesses lived in Walhalla quite happily. Each morning they

found some new beauty to admire. Each evening they came together for a feast or entertainment.

But in one heart there was no happiness, and that was the heart of the mighty Wotan himself. His beautiful home, the dream of his life, was finished. But at what a cost! The curse of the Rhine-Gold would come upon them, unless the stolen treasure was returned to its rightful guardians. The gods themselves would be destroyed, if they kept not their honor.

So Wotan sat apart from the rest, and his brow grew dark with forebodings. Fricka, his wife, gently chided him for his gloom but to no avail, and even the beautiful Freia could no longer make him smile. When any of the other gods praised the beauty of the palace, he would nod his head and answer: "Its price was great."

Finally Wotan could endure his anxiety no longer. Knowing that unless some way were found to restore the Gold they would be in constant peril, he resolved to consult Erda, the earth-spirit. So, one day he took his Spear of Authority and went forth into the world to find a way out of the trouble which had come to him with Walhalla.

The weeks grew into months and the months into years, while Wotan was gone. The other gods sought him in vain, but could hear no tid-

ings. They wondered what had become of him, and the feasting and revelry gave way to sad forebodings. Only Friçka, the queen, went about with some measure of confidence.

"Be not sad," she said. "Wotan will return soon, bringing with him some great means of safety and content."

Fricka spoke true. One fair day at early dawn the gods were awakened by the sound of warlike singing. It was entirely different from their own music, and it seemed borne to them on the wings of the wind. Nearer and nearer came the song, swelling into a splendid strain of triumph. Then flying figures were descried and the watchers at the windows saw Wotan returning to them as it were through the clouds. He was in the midst of a company of maidens, whose faces were fair but who were strong and soldier-like. Each rode upon a powerful horse, and, wonder of wonders, the horses had wings like eagles and flew swiftly through the air!

There were nine of these horses and riders in all, and so fast did they ride that they had reached the palace gates, dismounted, and were being led within by Wotan almost before the first strains of music had died away.

You may believe that all the gods and goddesses were exceedingly glad when they saw Wotan again; and they hastened out upon the

battlements to greet him and give him love and honor. To one and all he replied full pleasantly. His brow was clearer than it had been in many a day; and it was with the sprightliness of youth that he led the nine fair warriors up the broad palace steps. Then turning he addressed his court.

"These are the War Maidens," he said, "who come to guard our kingdom from its enemies. It is their mission to ride up and down in all the world, to choose the bravest heroes who have fallen in battle, and to bring them to Walhalla. With all these heroes we shall be protected from peril in the evil days to come."

Then Wotan introduced each War Maiden by name, beginning with Brunhilde who was the strongest and the loveliest. And they were welcomed royally to the palace by all who lived therein. The golden apples of life were given them to eat, and they became immortal.

Day by day the War Maidens rode forth into battle, seeking for the bravest men. Whenever they found one who had fallen in the forefront of conflict, they carried him to Walhalla where he became immortal. There was much fighting in the world in those days, so the palace soon received many mighty soldiers, and Wotan grew light of heart. For now, he thought, he could defy the dwarf's curse and all the powers of the

under-world. So he trained his soldiers constantly, and had them continually in battle, one against another. And if one by chance received a wound it healed of itself through magic power.

Still the loss of the Gold and of the Ring was an ever-present danger. Wotan knew this, and cast about for some means to restore the treasure to the Rhine-Daughters, so that the peril might be removed.

Now Fafner the giant had taken the Gold to a cave in the midst of a dense forest. By the aid of the magic helmet he had changed himself into a fierce dragon, and in this shape he guarded the mouth of the cave night and day. So you see that he wasn't getting very much pleasure out of his hoard.

Being a god, Wotan of course knew where Fafner the dragon lay hid. But neither he nor any of the gods could attack Fafner or lay hands upon the treasure. It had been given the giant in open trade and so was beyond their recall. But Wotan reasoned that if some earth-born hero could be found brave enough to slay the dragon, the Gold could be secured. Failing this, the dwarf Alberich might in the end be crafty enough to regain it and wreak his vengeance upon the gods.

The peril was still great therefore, in spite of the warriors in Walhalla. Wotan realized all

this and resolved to journey again through the world in quest of a hero to attack the dragon. For many days he searched without success. Then he chose a son of his own for the great task, living with him as a simple forester while the boy grew up, and training him to warlike deeds. The boy's name was Siegmund and as he reached young manhood he was straight as a young pine-tree in the forest and strong as the oak which defies the winds of heaven.

While Siegmund was still a youth a great sorrow befell him. Sieglinde a young girl of his own age with whom he had grown up, and whom he looked upon as a sister, was seized by a fierce hunter and carried away to his home in the forest. For many months Siegmund sought to rescue her, but without success. He grew to manhood with this object before him, and vowed eternal warfare against the hunter and all his clan,—a vow Wotan aided him to keep, until the very name of Siegmund became a terror to the hunter.

Then another sudden grief befell the young warrior. Wotan mysteriously went away one day, leaving no trace and no message save that when Siegmund should be in direst need he would find a trusty sword at hand to aid him. Siegmund now felt forsaken indeed; and he roamed about aimlessly in the forests, hunting

the wild beasts, helping people in distress, or fighting against the hunter's tribe.

One night, utterly spent from his wanderings, he sought shelter in a house built in a peculiar manner round the trunk of a great oak-tree. Seeing no one within the main room he entered, closed the door behind him, and lay down exhausted in front of the fire, where he soon fell fast asleep.

Presently a maiden came into the room. She expected to find the hunter there, for this was none other than his house, although Siegmund did not know it. When instead of the master of the house the maiden saw the stranger lying upon the hearth, she sprang back in sudden fear. But the poor man did not move, so she came gently to his side, to see whether he was alive or dead.

Siegmund stirred uneasily in his sleep, then, wakening, tried to utter a few words, but his parched lips gave forth little sound. Seeing his pitiable state, the maiden hastened to give him a drink. It revived him somewhat, and he sat up and gazed around. The maiden gave him more of the cup and gently asked him whence he came. He answered and began telling her of his wanderings without revealing his name. Just then the hunter himself arrived; but neither he nor Siegmund recognized the other as his sworn

enemy; and the hunter noting the young man's distressed condition bade him welcome for the night and invited him to the table to share his food. Siegmund accepted the invitation joyfully, and soon found his strength returning to him in the meat and drink.

In answer to his host's questions, he told the story of his past adventures; and the hunter found, for the first time, that his guest was the foe whom he had long been seeking to slay.

"Ha! I know you now!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "It is *you* who have done so much harm to me and mine! I would make you answer for your deeds here and now, were it not for the sacred laws of hospitality. But to-morrow I shall meet you! At sunrise be ready to fight and give me full satisfaction!"

Siegmund was astonished in his turn, but could not refuse the challenge. The hunter left him with these words, bidding the maiden also go into another room.

Left to himself the young man fell again into heaviness of spirit. It seemed to him that sorrow and trouble had followed him all the days of his life. He mused over his present defenseless condition—alone, unarmed and under his enemy's very roof. Then he recalled his father's promise, that a sword would be ready at his hand when his need was direst. Some-

The two were re-united in a fond embrace

how the thought of this promise brought comfort to him, and he fell into a quiet slumber.

After a time, during the stillness of night, a door opened softly and the maiden came toward him.

"Up!" she said, gently rousing him. "Up and flee for your life! The hunter has been planning mischief against you, but I gave him a sleeping draught."

"Why should I flee?" said Siegmund. "Give me but a sword and I turn my back upon no man! But who are you, fair lady, who do this kindness to a stranger? Methinks I have seen your face in earlier days than this."

"And I also seem to remember you," she answered, gazing at him earnestly. "My story is not a long one, but it is sad. When I was a little girl, this cruel hunter carried me away from home, and he has compelled me to live with him ever since. But one day during a feast a strange looking man with only one eye came in, bearing a mighty sword. He drove the sword to the hilt in the trunk of yonder tree, with one sweep of his arm, declaring that it was for only one man—the man who should be able to pull it forth again. Many stout men that day and since have tried to claim the sword, but there it sticks, where you may see the firelight

strike the handle. Perchance, poor stranger, it was left for you!"

"Ah, now I know my father's words were true!" Siegmund cried, joyously. "See! the sword is mine!"

And laying hold of the handle he drew the shining blade as easily as though the tree had been its scabbard.

"And thou, also, I know, my heart's best! Thou art Sieglinde, for whom I have sought all these years. Dost thou not remember thine old playmate, Siegmund?"

She gazed at him first with startled look; then a tender light of memory and love dawned in her eyes. Siegmund stretched out his arms to her and the two were reunited in a fond embrace.

"Come!" said Siegmund; "now will I flee, and thou must go with me. My father's sword shall shield us both, and never again while I live shall this robber have thee in his clutches."

The moon was shining brightly on this warm night in early spring. The wide world seemed to beckon her two children forth; and answering her summons and the glad call of their own hearts they fled away.

II

King Wotan knew of all these things. He knew that his dearly beloved son Siegmund had

found the magic sword, and had fled from the hunter's home. He foresaw also that the hunter would rise up full of wrath the next day, and pursue Siegmund to kill him. This must be prevented. The god summoned Brunhilde before him.

"Wisest and fairest of War Maidens," he said, "in yonder mountain gorge thou wilt discover a young man and a maiden who are dear to me. The maiden has been stolen away from a hunter who held her against her will, and the hunter now pursues the young man with intent to slay him. It is my will that he be not slain, but that he gain the victory over the hunter. See thou to it!"

Brunhilde gladly listened to Wotan's behest.

"It shall be done as thou desirest!" she exclaimed. "Hoyo-to-ho!"—the musical shout of the War Maidens came from her lips as she sprang from cliff to cliff and disappeared.

But she had hardly gone before Fricka, Wotan's queen, entered in a chariot drawn by two rams. Now Fricka was goddess of love and justice, and it grieved her that Siegmund should be allowed to take Sieglinde away with him as he had done.

"Justice, O Wotan!" she cried, "against the young man, Seigmund! The hunter from whose house he fled away, carrying the maiden Sieg-

linde, has called to me for help, and I have promised to aid him."

"The hunter held the maid against her will," replied Wotan.

"Nathless his right to her had become recognized among men. So she must be restored to him, else men will say that there is no justice in the world."

Wotan's brow was wrinkled moodily. He knew that Sieglinde had dwelt so many years under the hunter's roof that all men believed she rightfully belonged there. Yet in his heart he longed to protect his son.

Fricka saw the struggle but would not relent. She added many words to what she had said and urged her case so strongly that every law the gods had made seemed enlisted with the hunter's cause. At last Wotan, heavy in spirit, agreed to give the victory to him.

After Fricka had departed, he dispatched swift messengers after Brunhilde, and told her of his last decision. The War Maiden listened reluctantly and was full of grief when she learned that she must aid the hunter against Siegmund.

"Why dost thou do this, O father?" she asked gently.

"Because the laws of the gods demand it," he answered.

Then the sorrow-stricken Wotan unburdened his heart to her and told her of the Rhine-Gold; of the Ring that had been fashioned from it; of the curse that had followed; and of many other things which we have set forth in this book.

"The curse of the Ring is the fate of Siegmund," he concluded. "That is why I am powerless to protect him. See that thou dost obey my latest command!"

So saying he departed, amid the rumblings of a thunder-cloud, leaving Brunhilde full of sorrow at the strange tale she had heard and the sad errand she must perform.

But she turned her steps dutifully down the mountain gorge, and there in a sheltering cave she found the young man and maiden. Sieglinde had become tired out from their wanderings, and Siegmund had borne her into the cave and was supporting her head upon his knee, while smoothing back the stray locks of gold from her lovely forehead. So intent was he upon this devotion that he did not see Brunhilde when she came into the entrance.

If the War Maiden had longed to befriend these two before she saw them, how much more did her heart soften when she beheld this sweet picture! But her duty must be done. She called softly to Siegmund and he raised his head.

"I am the War Maiden," she said, "and am

sent to warn thee of thy fate. Thine enemy follows hard upon thy heels; and none who look upon my face survive a battle."

"I fear not for battle," answered Siegmund stoutly. "This magic sword was left me by my father, and with it I must surely be victorious!"

"It will avail thee not; for the gods have decreed that thou must die. But glory awaits thee in Walhalla, whither I am summoned to bear thee after death."

"What is Walhalla?" he asked.

"It is the Hall of Heroes, among whom thou wilt be first."

"Will I find my father there, and my sweet comrade Sieglinde?"

The search for these two had consumed the youthful warrior's whole life, so his voice trembled eagerly as he asked this question.

Brunhilde smiled, then shook her head sadly.

"Thy father?—Yes, in Walhalla shalt thou find him. But Sieglinde cannot come to thee there."

"Then take my greetings to Walhalla!" he exclaimed.

Greet for me Wotan!
Hail to my Father
And all the heroes!
Hail the War Maidens;
For now I follow not thee!

By this time Brunhilde's heart had become so touched that she boldly resolved to disobey Wotan's last command, and do as he really desired. Smiling upon Siegmund, she bade him be of good heart, as she had only been testing his courage. Then she told him she would be with him and aid him in the coming strife.

Even while she spoke the hunter's horn was heard, and soon the man himself came hastening fiercely along. He did not see Siegmund at first, for a heavy storm had come up, while the heavens seemed rent with terrific crashes of thunder. The din finally aroused the sleeping Sieglinde and she gazed around wildly. Siegmund had sprung out of the cave to confront his enemy; and there in front of the cave he stood revealed by a flash of lightning, battling strongly with the hunter. Sieglinde uttered a cry of grief and was about to rush between them when another sudden blaze of light made her draw back. At one side she beheld the War Maiden standing ready to protect Siegmund. The young man pressed upon the hunter and was about to strike him to earth with his trusty sword, when a glowing red flame burst through the clouds. Wotan himself appeared with his dread Spear and stretched it across the sword. The magic blade broke in sunder, and Siegmund fell dead, pierced by the hunter's weapon. But

the hunter himself did not survive the conflict, for a glance from the single blazing eye of the angry god stretched him lifeless on the sward.

III

When Wotan appeared, Brunhilde started back amazed and fearful. She began to realize what it meant to disobey the god's command. Hastily seizing the fainting form of Sieglinde she sprang upon her winged steed and fled swiftly from the tragic scene. Far and fast through the storm she sped, glancing around fearfully, ever and anon, and fancying each rumble of the thunder was Wotan's voice. Then she turned her horse's head toward the summit of a lofty crag. It was the usual meeting-place of all the War Maidens on their way to Walhalla. Soon the crag came in sight, and there awaiting her were her eight companions, hailing her swift approach with "Hoyo-to-ho!" their battle cry.

Hardly taking time to answer their joyous greetings, Brunhilde placed Sieglinde gently on the ground and cried,

"Save us, O my sisters! Save us from the wrath of Wotan!"

"Why, what crime hast thou committed?" cried the other War Maidens in alarm.

Brunhilde knelt at his feet

"I have disobeyed the god's command, and even now he rides hard after me upon the wings of the tempest! Save this innocent mortal, at least! *She* has done no wrong."

"I do not wish for life!" exclaimed Sieglinde, who had just recovered consciousness. "Why should I live when Siegmund is dead? I pray you draw your sword and slay me!"

"Not so," said Brunhilde soothingly. "The fates decree that thou must live. And see, I have saved for thee the Sword of Need which was broken in Siegmund's hands. Keep it for his son, the hero who shall know no fear, and he shall do mighty deeds with its mended blade."

So saying Brunhilde drew from the folds of her cloak the two pieces of the broken sword and gave them to Sieglinde and whispered in her ear words of tenderness and balm. And Sieglinde's face lost its hopeless look, and she promised to go wherever the War Maiden might direct.

"Haste thee, then!" urged Brunhilde. "The time is short. In only one place wilt thou be safe from Wotan, and that is the depth of yonder forest. There dwells Fafner the dragon, and there Wotan never ventures because of the curse of the Ring."

The tempest had increased in fury while Brunhilde was speaking. The dense darkness

shielded Sieglinde while she hurried away. She was scarce gone, hugging the precious sword, when a terrific clap of thunder shook the whole cliff and Wotan appeared in a flash of light.

"Brunhilde! Brunhilde!" he called.

Brunhilde did not answer; and the other War-Maidens, braving his anger through loyalty and love for their sister, hid her in their midst.

"Brunhilde!" again thundered Wotan, "stand forth! Art afraid to hear thy doom?"

"Not so, O mighty father!" replied Brunhilde; and she stepped forward proudly and knelt at his feet.

"Ah, Brunhilde! how couldst thou disobey my command?" asked Wotan more in sadness than in anger. "Thou hast brought thy fate upon thyself."

"I but tried to save one who was dear to thee," she answered.

"But thou didst violate my will, and henceforth can be a War Maiden no more. Thou must descend to earth, lose thy immortality, and live the life of any other woman."

On hearing this terrible decree, by which she lost the rank of goddess, Brunhilde sank upon the ground with a piteous cry.

"Have mercy, O Wotan!" she pleaded, "I have tried to meet the wishes of thy heart, as given in thy first command. Do not banish me forever

from my dear sisters and thy beloved presence. Have mercy!"

"Have mercy!" cried her sisters stretching out their hands toward the god.

"Silence!" said Wotan solemnly. "I have spoken, and it must be done. Ah, dearly loved maiden, how gladly would I save thee if it were so decreed! But thou must sink to the ground in deep sleep. And it shall come to pass that in after years the man who shall awaken thee shall claim thee for his bride.

"As for ye other maidens," he continued, glancing around with a flash of the eye, "beware how ye fail to keep faith with me again! And come not again into my presence this day."

The War Maidens fled in woe and terror at this speech, leaving Brunhilde and Wotan alone upon the rock. The sky was clearing, the wind was dying away, and the moon came forth and looked down upon the scene. There was silence for many long moments, until Brunhilde unable to endure it rose slowly to her feet in all her beauty and pride, yet with wild entreaty in her voice.

"Oh, father, father!" she pleaded, " save me from this fate, for the honor of all the gods! Do not place me within reach of any coward among men, who might chance to awaken me. If I must fall asleep to wake a mortal woman, grant

me this last request. Place me in some spot so hedged about with danger that none but the bravest of all men may find me and claim me for his own!"

Wotan gazed at her—all the old love and pride for her shining in his eyes. He gently drew her to him and kissed her upon the eye-lids.

"It shall be as thou dost wish," he said. "I shall shield thee with a barrier of living fire so that none save a true hero can rescue thee. And now farewell, my darling child! How I shall miss thee in Walhalla, and on our rides of glory, thou dost little know. Farewell! farewell!"

Brunhilde clasped her arms about his neck and smiled for the last time in his face. He bent down and kissed her again, and yet again. A deep sleep came over her and she sank slowly down. Wotan carried her tenderly to a low mound of moss upon the very crest of the towering rock, and there he placed his shield over her to protect her from all harm. Again he gazed long and mournfully on her features, then closed the visor of the helmet she wore, and turning began a mystic waving of his Spear of Authority. He ended by summoning Loki, god of fire.

Loki, hark,
Hitherward haste,
As I found thee first,
In a fiery waste;
As once thou didst fly

In fiery display;
As then I did call thee
I call thee to-day!
Arise with thy flaming—
Encircle this place,
To daunt the craven
Whom my spear could not face!
Loki! Loki! arise!

At the last call he struck the rock thrice with his Spear, and instantly a stream of fire gushed forth and licked upward in tongues of flame from every side. Higher and wider they spread leaping and crackling till they formed a complete circle round the mossy bed where Brunhilde lay sleeping. And as they swept upward in the night air they seemed to blend in strains of music sweet as the thrumming of a harp and soft as the lullaby of a mother crooning her child to sleep.

SIEGFRIED THE FEARLESS

I

SEVERAL years passed by while Brunhilde lay in her enchanted sleep. Summers and winters came and went, yet still she lay there unharmed in her magic circle of fire, and growing no whit older than when she first sank down in slumber, in all her youth and beauty.

Down in the depths of the forest far below the crag on which she rested, Fafner the dragon still guarded the Rhine-Gold and Ring. He had come to be known only as the dragon, because—giant though he was—he had always been afraid to leave this hideous shape lest some one should overcome him and seize the treasure.

And he had good cause to fear. Although the Gold bore a curse with it, there was more than one who sought to lay hand upon it. Wotan the mighty had even forsaken the beautiful palace of Walhalla which cost him so much and was now roaming over the earth seeking some hero to slay the dragon. He had indeed come to be known as the "Wanderer" because of his constant search. The dwarfs also had by no means forgotten the glittering hoard which

Instantly a stream of fire gushed forth

had been taken away from them. Alberich went about in sullen discontent, biding his time; while Mime, his brother who had made the magic helmet, could not forget the Gold night or day. Mime knew where the dragon lay hid, so he set about laying plans to outwit or slay him.

Now the dwarfs had always lived deep down in the caves of the earth. They had seemed actually afraid of the sunlight, and it may be that they were afraid of their own shadows, for no greater cowards ever lived. But with all their cowardice they were sly, and had a wonderful faculty of finding out all sorts of secrets. Mime had discovered the whole story of the Gold, the helmet, the Ring, the curse, the building of Walhalla, and the dread which had fallen upon the gods. He learned of all this and many other things; and he laughed and rubbed his hands craftily.

"Aha!" he said, "*I* will find a way to seize the Ring and rule the whole world! I will watch this dragon day and night, and sooner or later I shall surprise him."

So Mime the dwarf summoned up courage enough to appear above ground. He betook himself to Fafner's forest, where he soon found the huge monster crouched before the door of his cave. For many days and nights Mime lay

hid, waiting for a chance to slip past the great beast, but no such chance came.

"I shall have to kill him," said Mime to himself. And at the bare thought his teeth chattered with fear. "But even if I had a sword stout enough and long enough to reach his heart, I should never have courage enough to wield it."

This thought was very discouraging to him, yet he was unwilling to give up hope of the Gold. For many days he pondered and plotted, till at last he thought of a plan.

"I have it!" he exclaimed slapping his thigh. "I shall build a blacksmith's forge hard by here in the wood, where I shall make nothing but swords. At last my skill will bring forth the best blade in the world, and I shall offer it to the mightiest hero who may come riding by. Who knows? Perhaps one will be found brave enough to fight the dragon, when I tell him just how to do it. Then after he kills the dragon—we will see!"

He chuckled at the cunning plan he had made, while the evil light in his eyes boded no good for the after fate of the chosen hero.

This plan seemed wild, yet it was the best that offered, so Mime began it at once. He built his smithy, and having been used to this trade all his life in the under-world, he speedily felt quite at home. Soon his forge-fires shone brightly

through the forest, and the sound of his hammering disturbed the birds and beasts.

One day during a lull in his work he heard a faint tap at his door. He asked harshly who was there, but receiving no reply he peered cautiously outside. There on the threshold lay a poor woman feebly holding a little child in her arms. Her strength seemed spent, and even the rough Mime felt pity for her distress. He carried her into the smithy and laid her near the forge-fire, then hastened to pour some cordial down her throat. The drink revived her slightly and she sat up and tried to lift the child.

"Take care of him," she gasped. "His name is Siegfried. He comes from a race of heroes."

"How am I to know that he is of hero born?" asked the dwarf bluntly.

"Here, here!" she answered eagerly, drawing some fragments of a sword from the folds of her dress. "It was his father's sword—the wonderful Sword of Need. Keep it safe for him and he shall do—mighty—deeds——"

Her voice trailed away into silence, and the dwarf bending down perceived that she was dead.

It was poor Sieglinde who had hid away from the wrath of Wotan, as Brunhilde had bidden her. At last her sad life was ended, and per-

chance her spirit found peace with that of Siegmund in some happier clime.

Mime now turned his attention to the little child for the first time. He saw that its limbs were sturdily knit, and that already it held its head erect and looked one squarely in the eye—which was more than the dwarf had ever done in his whole life.

"Who knows?" muttered Mime. "This may be the hero for whom I have been waiting. I will bring him up as my son, and train him to my set purpose. At any rate he could soon be useful blowing the fire."

So he adopted the little Siegfried and cared for him, during his helpless days, in a dwarf's rude way. He hollowed out a log for the baby's cradle, and spread a bearskin over it. He gave him goat's milk to drink, and let him play with the broken handles of swords. Every fair morning he carried him out into the bright sunshine and left him to kick his heels and shout back answers to the singing birds. But the dwarf himself rarely ventured outdoors. He seemed to prefer the soot and smoke of his forge-fire. He hammered away, and hummed a moody tune, and took comfort in thinking of the day when this foster-child should be sent to slay the dragon.

But if Mime had expected the lad to mend the fires and work in the shop, he soon found himself mistaken. The little fellow thrived wonderfully and took to the life of the forest naturally. On the other hand he had no use for the forge or, it must be confessed, for his foster-father. He soon came to despise the dwarf as a coward, for he himself showed no fear of anything. So he roamed every day in the forest returning only at nightfall with some animal he had slain. Once he harnessed a wild bear with ropes and drove it into the blacksmith shop, nearly causing Mime to fly out of his wits from terror.

When Siegfried arrived at young manhood he was a goodly sight to look upon. His limbs were strong and powerful, yet rounded and graceful. His skin was tinged with the ruddy hue of outdoor life. His fair hair fell in soft curls to his shoulders, as the manner then was; and his blue eyes met one's look frankly and fearlessly.

Though he had been taught to look upon Mime as his father, Siegfried soon rejected this belief with scorn. He felt no love for the dwarf, such as a son would feel; and he could not help contrasting his own powerful frame and courage with the smith's weak, cringing way. The only tie which now bound them together was a

promise made by the dwarf that he would forge a sword with which Siegfried could win every battle. The young man waited impatiently for this sword to be made; and Mime actually worked early and late to finish it. But alas! no sooner would he temper a blade so that it seemed perfect, when Siegfried would return from the chase and say,

"Ho! *this* is the sword you have made for me to-day!"

And he would shiver it to bits upon the anvil.

This went on day after day, until Siegfried lost all patience and began to threaten the dwarf.

"Hark you, Mime!" he cried. "Give me the stout blade you promised, or it will not go well with you to-morrow night."

"You would not harm your father!" whined the dwarf. "Remember how I have cared for you and sheltered you."

"I have long since paid that score in meat and skins," answered Siegfried. "And as for your being my father, you know that is false. Answer me directly! I would know who my father was!"

His manner was so threatening that the dwarf was thoroughly frightened.

"I—I—do not know who your father was," he stammered; "your mother was Sieglinde, a poor woman whom I sheltered here when you

were a baby. She gave me an old broken sword. See, here it is!"

And he rummaged beneath a pile of skins and brought to light the pieces of the magic Sword of Need.

"Ha! that is good metal!" cried Siegfried, as he examined it. "I will have no sword but this. See to it that 'tis mended for me 'gainst another night."

The smith promised, though in a quaking voice, for he was by no means certain that he could mend the weapon. His fears were well founded. When he tried to do so, the next day, the pieces refused to unite in his hands. After making repeated attempts he sank down behind the anvil in despair.

At this moment a strange-looking man entered the doorway. He was tall and powerful. He wore a long dark cloak, and carried a spear instead of a staff. On his head was a large hat whose broad brim shaded one eye that was evidently injured or missing.

"The Wanderer!" muttered the dwarf in abject fear.

It was indeed Wotan the Wanderer.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded in a voice of thunder, pointing to the broken blade.

"I—I am trying to mend the—the Sword of

Need," said the dwarf. He knew there was no use in telling an untruth, as Wotan had already recognized the weapon.

"Where did you get it?" Wotan asked.

" 'Twas given me by Sieglinde the mother of Siegfried. Mercy, mercy! I cannot mend it!"

"Peace, fool! You speak truth. No one but the hero who knows no fear can weld those pieces together!"

So saying he struck his spear upon the floor with a noise like thunder and turning strode away into the forest.

Mime dared not look after him or ask any questions. Indeed, he was in such utter terror that he did not venture from behind the anvil where he lay hid all day. And here it was that Siegfried found him when he returned home.

"Mime, have you got my sword done yet?" he called.

"Pardon! pardon!" whined the dwarf. "Oh, I have had such an awful scare!"

"A scare? What is that?" asked Siegfried.

"I mean, I have been in dreadful fear," answered Mime.

"Fear? What is that?" asked Siegfried.

"Know you not what fear is?" said Mime, starting up and remembering Wotan's words

that only the hero who knew no fear could mend the sword.

The young man shook his head.

Mime pressed the subject farther. "Suppose you should meet a great monster in the forest," he said; "a huge dragon whose eyes and mouth shot fire, whose tail lashed this way and that, tearing down the trees, whose tongue was sharp as a sword, and whose terrible fangs could crush you like an insect. Suppose this terrible dragon should come rushing down to devour you. How would you feel?"

"There is no such beast as that," replied Siegfried smiling.

"Oh, but there is!" urged the dwarf, his own eyes growing big with alarm as he thought of Fafner. "There is! Down in the depths of this very forest lurks a dragon ten times more dreadful than I have said. He lies crouched in a thicket before a cave, and even the gods are afraid to come near him."

"Then he would be worth fighting!" exclaimed Siegfried with flashing eyes. "Forge me this sword as you promised, and then show me the way to his lair!"

"I cannot mend the blade," confessed Mime sullenly. "Only he who has no fear in his heart can mend it or wield it."

Siegfried glanced at him a moment in anger;

then as if despairing of getting the dwarf to do the work, he seized the fragments with one hand and the bellows with the other.

"Stand aside!" he commanded. "I will mend the blade."

And he set to work while the dwarf looked on in wonder.

First Siegfried took a file and began rubbing the steel into fine powder.

"Stop!" screamed the dwarf. "You are ruining it."

"Oh, no, I am not," laughed Siegfried, filing the faster.

Soon the sword, all but the handle, was changed into powder. Then Siegfried placed the powder over the fire and blew a bright blaze underneath it. And as he worked the bellows he sang from pure joy in his work,

Hoho! hoho!
Hahei! hahei!
Bellows blow
The blaze on high!
Deep in the wood
There lived a tree,

Its ashes here
In the flames I see.
Hoho! hoho!
Hahei! hahei!
Bellows blow:
The tree must die!

But the flashing fire
Hath won its way;

It sputters and flares
In the metal's spray.
Hoho! hoho!
Hahei! hahei!

Bellows blow
The flame on high!
The Sword of Need
Will soon be made
And then aloft
I shall flash my blade!

When he finished the song the powder had become a molten mass. He ran this into a mould, and plunged it into the water. The loud hiss of cooling metal was heard. Presently he seized the new blade with a pair of pincers and heated it red hot. Allowing it to remain but a moment in the coals, he placed it upon the anvil and beat it with mighty blows till the blade was sharp and thin. Then heating it once again he fastened it to the handle.

He swung the weapon critically and tested its temper. Again he heated it, and beat it till the shop was filled with flying sparks. But now it emerged bright and keen—the most perfect blade in all the world. Triumphantly he sang,

Ah, Sword of Need!
Anew thou art wrought;
Back unto life and strength
Thou art brought!

"See, Mime! *This* is the sword I wished you to forge!"

And making the sword whistle about his head he brought it down squarely upon the anvil. From top to bottom the heavy anvil was cleaved, falling into two pieces with a thunderous noise.

II

"Farewell!" cried Siegfried; "the smithy sees me no more from this day. I go to seek the dragon!" and he hurried forth with his wonderful new sword into the forest.

"Wait a moment!" called Mime, running after him; "you cannot find the cave unless I show you the way."

"I thought you were too great a coward for that," laughed Siegfried.

"Who's afraid?" panted the dwarf as he caught up with him. "Besides I am only going to point out the place. *You* are the one that's going to be eaten!"

In fact, Mime was quite anxious to have the young man meet the dragon. No matter how the fight turned out, he reasoned that he himself would be the gainer. In the event Siegfried killed the beast and escaped unharmed, Mime intended to give him a poisonous draught which he had prepared. Then with both these foes out of the way, the dwarf believed that the wonderful Gold of the curse would be his without any further struggle.

But in this Mime was wrong, for his brother Alberich, who had first stolen the Gold from the Rhine-maidens, was even then watching the dragon's cave and had been on guard there night and day. Wotan the Wanderer found him there upon this day of fate, and unheeding the dwarf's taunts and reproaches told him of Siegfried and Mime's approach. Alberich now hid behind some rocks to watch what should happen.

"See, that is the cave," said Mime pointing it out to Siegfried when they were still some distance away. "I can go no farther, as I am very tired from running to catch up with you. But go straight ahead, and I wish you success—and the dragon an equal amount!" The last words he muttered to himself, then scurried for a safe place where he could watch the fight.

It was a beautiful morning, and the birds were caroling sweetly in the tree-tops. Siegfried cast himself down upon the sward to rest himself and enjoy the quiet sylvan scene a little while. The birds seemed to be talking to him. He could not understand their sweet language, but he tried to imitate it upon a reed whistle. Failing in his attempt he seized the horn which was slung around his shoulders and blew a loud clear note as a challenge to the dragon. At once a tremendous crashing sound was heard in a near-by thicket.

"Ah! that must be the dragon!" said Siegfried craning his neck without getting up.

Again he heard the roar, followed by a terrible snorting and hissing and yawning, and out came a huge lizard-like serpent plunging through the underbrush toward him.

"Who are you?" it growled.

"Oh, you can talk, can you?" said Siegfried. "I am a man who has been sent to you to learn what fear is."

"You will find out if you live long enough!" roared the dragon showing its fangs and licking out a long forked tongue. "I will devour you in two mouthfuls."

"Oh, no!" laughed Siegfried. "I object. But if you do not teach me what fear is, it will be the worse for you!"

This taunt angered the dragon, as Siegfried intended. It sprang forward, lashed about with its tail and poured forth flame and smoke from its nostrils. Siegfried leaped easily to one side and evaded both dangers. The dragon turned upon him at close range and struck again with its tail. Siegfried vaulted high in the air, so that the tail swept the ground smoothly under him without touching. Quick as a flash he smote the scaly back with his keen sword, so that the black blood poured forth in torrents. The dragon uttered loud bellows of rage and pain,

and reared upon Siegfried with the forepart of its body in order to crush him; but as it reared, its breast was exposed, and Siegfried was swift to seize his advantage. With a powerful blow he drove the Sword of Need up to the hilt in the monster's heart.

"Woe is me!" gasped the dragon rolling upon the earth in a dying condition. "Reckless youth, do you know what you have done?"

"I know I have slain a foul beast because he would not teach me fear."

"Ah, I perceive you are the tool of others," said the dragon in a weak voice. "Know then that I am Fafner the last of the giant's race. I guarded the Rhine-Gold; but beware of it! a curse follows all who possess it! Beware!"

Then with a dreadful groan the dragon expired.

Siegfried drew his sword from its breast, and as he did so a drop of blood fell upon his hand. It burned like a coal of fire, and instinctively he licked it with his tongue to stop the pain. Suddenly a strange new power came upon him. He knew not what it was, but stood silent and amazed waiting to discover what it could be. Then in the silence a bird sang to him from a linden-tree—the same song he had heard before; but this time he could understand it! It was as though the bird were speaking his own tongue!

"The Rhine-Gold is now yours," it sang. "There in the cave you will find it. Be careful to take also the helmet of darkness and the Ring of Power."

Siegfried thanked the friendly bird, and hastened into the cave. While he was gone, Mime and Alberich crept up and for the first time became aware of each other's presence. A violent quarrel at once began as to which should claim the treasure, but it was speedily silenced by the return of Siegfried clad in shining armor and bearing the helmet and Ring. The two dwarfs slunk away again unperceived by the young man, who walked thoughtfully along listening to the wood-bird, which had recommenced its song. And these were the words of the song:

Ha! Siegfried now holds
Both the helmet and Ring;
Beware of sly Mime—
Trust him not in anything!

Siegfried again thanked the bird for its warning, which was indeed timely; for Mime now approached him with great pretended delight in his safety.

"Have you learned what fear is?" he asked with a grin.

"No, I have not," answered Siegfried.

"Then sit you down and rest, bravest of men!" said the dwarf. "And see, here is a cooling cup

Then in the silence a bird sang to him

of mead I have brought for you. It will quiet you and cause you to forget your weariness."

"It is poison," retorted the young man. "Thanks to the dragon's blood, I can read all your wicked heart! Wretch, take your just deserts!"

With that he dashed the poison cup to the ground, and stretched the dwarf, with one blow, dead at his feet.

"It was his life or mine at the last," he said, as he wended his way thoughtfully into the forest. In spite of his victory over the dragon, he was not elated. Instead, he was thinking how barren his life had been without friends or kindred, and how aimless it seemed even now, despite the Gold. Sighing heavily he sat down upon a log and buried his face in his hands.

"Lonely, lonely! Of all men I am most lonely!" he cried.

"Would you find a love to comfort you?" sang the clear voice of the bird over his head. "I know where you might find the fairest lady in all the world.

> On a lofty crag she sleeps,
> Her guard is a flaming fire;
> And he must bravely pierce the blaze
> Who would win his heart's desire.

Siegfried sprang to his feet. "This quest is to my liking! Tell me more about it!" he exclaimed.

The bride to win,
Brunhilde to wake,
Is no coward's task,
Or whom fear doth shake.

Thus sang the wood-bird again, and Siegfried listened to him joyfully.

"Show me the way to the lofty crag, I pray you, good bird!" he exclaimed. "Show me the way, that I may greet the lady or look into the face of fear!"

By way of answer the little bird fluttered away toward the heights leading up the mountain-side. Siegfried eagerly followed, over stones, through thickets, beneath huge trees, across dangerous chasms, but always being careful not to lose sight of the bird.

III

At last they came to a wild, rocky gorge, extending to the last line of cliffs, and there the bird suddenly disappeared. But Siegfried saw a narrow chasm like a giant's pathway leading upward to the crest, and this, he decided, was the route he must follow. After a last look to see where the bird had gone, he prepared to ascend the path, when he came face to face with Wotan.

Seigfried had never seen the god before, yet now was in nowise dismayed, although the

strange looking figure in long cloak and broad hat was larger and more commanding than any he had ever met before this day. In Wotan's hand was the dread Spear of Authority, with which he ruled the world.

"Where are you going?" asked the god.

"I know not," replied Siegfried. "A little bird told me of a rock surrounded by fire, and of a lovely maiden who sleeps there. But now the bird is gone, and I must find my way alone."

"Do you not fear the fire?"

"Fear? Why do I continually hear that strange word? What is fear? That also have I come to seek. Know you the way?"

"It lies up through yonder rift," replied Wotan, wishing to test the young man's bravery yet farther; "but the journey is one of terror. Upon the mountain-top the flames leap fiercely. Sheets of fire driven before the wind rage on every side."

"The fiery foe I challenge!" answered Siegfried. "I must rescue Brunhilde at any cost." And he strode toward the rocky chasm.

"Back, rash youth!" commanded Wotan, stretching out his Spear. "You shall not pass while this all-powerful weapon prevents!"

"It shall not avail against this magic blade!" replied Siegfried, drawing the Sword of Need.

Wotan started at sight of the fateful blade.

"Where got you the weapon?" he asked.

"At Mime's forge I made it— the best metal in the world!"

"But it shall not prevail against the Spear, for by it was the Sword first broken," answered Wotan.

"Ah!" cried Siegfried, rushing forward. "Then you were my father's foe! On guard, before my Sword brings vengeance upon you!"

He swung the Sword with terrific force through the air. It met the Spear with a crash like thunder, and the once powerful Spear was broken. The owner of the Ring was indeed master of the world!

"Go forward!" said Wotan sadly. "No longer can I hold you. The doom of the gods was foretold before you came into the world. You are but the instrument of fate."

And he disappeared.

Siegfried glanced at the spot where he had stood, in astonishment. Then seeing no further bar to his progress, he ran lightly up the rough pathway. Presently he heard a dull roaring sound and saw, on the mountain height, a huge mass of flames which leaped in every direction and seemed to touch the very sky. Red and wrathful they shone, shutting off the pathway by what appeared to be a solid body of fire, while clouds of smoke hid the view on every side.

But Siegfried pressed forward undaunted. Putting his hunting-horn to his lips he sounded a merry note as if in challenge. And as he went on, a wonderful thing happened. The fire parted slightly to right and left, letting him pass by unharmed. On he went until he came to the inner circle which the flame had guarded; and now it vanished utterly leaving the blue sky and the free air of heaven.

On a moss-covered rock Siegfried saw some one lying asleep, beneath a heavy shield. He lifted this and beheld what appeared to be a youth clad in bright armor. The helmet hid the face, but when he carefully removed the heavy head-dress a mass of beautiful golden hair was loosened. The features were those of the lovely Brunhilde.

"Ah! it is not a man!" exclaimed Seigfried gazing at the face in rapture. "It is the maid I have come to seek! How still she is! How can I waken her from this slumber?"

He tried gently to rouse her by calling, but there was no response. Only her deep breathing told him that she was alive.

"'Tis the beautiful one I have long dreamed of seeing!" he murmured; "the one maid I could worship and serve! Now I cannot waken her, and all my past hardships have been in vain."

He knelt down and gazed long and rapturously into her face. Then unable to restrain his emotions any longer he bent and pressed his lips full and fervently upon hers.

Instantly the maid awoke. While Siegfried started back in rapture she sat up as easily as though yesterday had witnessed the beginning of her long sleep. She gazed about her in delight, and burst forth into a little cry of gladness:

Hail to thee, Sun,
Hail to thee, Light,
Hail, thou luminous Day!
Deep was my sleep,
Long was the night!

Then looking about she asked, "Who is the hero that has come to waken me?"

"I am Siegfried," he replied modestly.

"Siegfried, son of Sieglinde?" she cried. "Then I knew your mother in those past years before I fell asleep!"

"Oh, tell me of her and of my father!" he exclaimed, his eyes shining. "But, I am not thoughtful," he added in another tone. "You are in need of refreshment after your long slumber."

"I am a daughter of the gods," she answered, "and feel no faintness or weariness as mortals do."

Siegfried who had come near to her, drew back as though struck by a blow.

"A daughter of the gods!" he exclaimed. "I—I had hoped to claim you for my bride!"

In his ingenuous youth, his inner thoughts rose naturally to his lips.

Brunhilde smiled sadly and shook her head.

"See yonder horse, which also has been asleep?" she asked. "It is Grani my winged steed, upon which I used to ride through the clouds with my sisters. Would you bid me stay upon earth?"

"Ah, Brunhilde, my love is selfish, I know! But if your heart could feel half the fire that burns in mine, you would gladly stay upon earth like other women!"

"Like other women!" the words brought back the decree of Wotan in a flash, and Brunhilde sat as though stunned. Then she looked proudly at the fearless hero with his frank face and deep blue eyes; and as she looked the love-light shining in his face was lit upon her own.

Siegfried knelt and pressed his lips to her hands, with bowed head. He looked not again for very joy, and lest the light he had seen should be vanished.

"Brunhilde! Brunhilde!" he whispered. "Can it be true?"

For answer Brunhilde clasped her arms

around his neck and looked up laughingly into the sky. And again she sang—this time a note of glad renunciation. The proud War Maiden, the daughter of the gods, had found a joy in the mortal life of a loving woman, such as she had never dreamed.

Away, Walhalla!
Glorious world!
Farewell, thou gorgeous
Realm of the gods!
End in delight
O lofty race!
Night of destruction
Thy terrors are gone;
I stand in the glow
Of Siegfried's star!

Then Siegfried in his turn sang of love and Brunhilde. And the two sweet voices blended together at the last in a triumphant strain,

My own forever,
And parting never,
For aye and ever.
Shining in Love!
And smiling at death!

THE DOWNFALL OF THE GODS

I

WHEN Brunhilde promised to become Siegfried's wife she well knew what it would cost her. She would no longer be of the family of the gods, nor would she have strength and wisdom beyond other mortal women. Yet she now had no regrets. Her love for her hero eclipsed every other thing, and she knew only that she was entirely happy in the present.

Long the lovers sat and talked, forgetful of all the outside world. Siegfried told Brunhilde of his adventures; his fight with the dragon; his possession of the helmet and the Ring; and finally his encounter with the mysterious stranger whose spear he had shattered.

Brunhilde started up at this. She had recognized Wotan at once from the description.

"The spear was *broken,* you say?" she exclaimed questioningly. "Are you sure it was broken?"

"It fell shivered upon the ground beneath my sword."

"What did the stranger do?"

"He looked sadly at me, saying that he was powerless to hinder me further. Then he vanished suddenly."

"Ah, woe to the gods!" ejaculated the maiden. "Their doom is indeed coming upon them! Siegfried, the spear you broke was the dread Spear of Authority with which great Wotan ruled the world. Now, all the old order of things shall pass away. Walhalla itself must fall, because of the curse of the Ring."

"The curse of the Ring?" asked Siegfried in an astonished voice. "What is that?"

"It is the sad fate which has followed upon the heels of a bad deed," she answered. "King Wotan himself told me the tale upon that day so long ago when I disobeyed him." She shuddered slightly at the memory, then went on: "It is bound up in your own fate, so I will tell you also the story."

Then Siegfried listened with wide-open eyes while Brunhilde told him of the lost Rhine-Gold; the building of Walhalla; the reward of the giants; and the curse of the Ring. His breath was bated and his eyes were very moist when she told further of Siegmund and Sieglinde and the wrath of Wotan.

"Then *you* were the protector of my father and mother!" he said, embracing her joyfully.

"Ah, how much love and devotion do I owe you, fairest and dearest of goddess-maidens!"

"Will you never forget me?" she asked.

By way of reply he drew the magic Ring from his finger and placed it upon hers.

"Let this be our troth," he said. "From this moment it becomes a blessing instead of a curse, and our lives shall be one life forevermore."

"It shall tell me always of you," answered Brunhilde. "For I know you cannot linger here, dearly as I should desire it. You come of a race of heroes, and great deeds await you upon earth. Your sword must not grow rusty in idleness, nor your strength weak through ease."

"'Tis true," he said with a sad but resolute look in his blue eyes as he glanced far over the nestling valleys. "'Tis true that my life work is yet to be begun. But, alas! Brunhilde, how can I leave you? You are the only person I have ever known that gave me sympathy or love."

Brunhilde pressed his hands tenderly.

"My sympathy and love shall *always* be for you!" she whispered; "here shall I await your return to me. Loki will build his barrier of fire about me once more, and only you, the hero who knows no fear, can find your way back again.

"And now take with you Grani my good horse. He can no longer fly through the clouds as formerly, when his mistress was one of the immortals. But he will go through fire and water for you, and will be your devoted slave."

The maiden called the beautiful horse which had been aroused out of sleep at the same time she was awakened, and which was now grazing near by. Grani came to them whinnying gently. Siegfried patted the steed's soft nose, then took the bridle slowly, as if unwilling to speak. He girded on his sword, placed his helmet firmly upon his head, and slung his bugle around his shoulders.

"Farewell, beloved!" said Brunhilde softly.

"Farewell, beloved!" he answered. "My hunting-horn shall tell you from the valley all that I cannot say."

One lingering embrace, and he turned and led his steed down the steep path. Brunhilde watched his descent with shining eyes. Presently from the valley below she heard the mellow notes of the horn sweet and clear. Then the faint gallop of hoofs told her that Siegfried had gone forth into the world to play the part Fate gave him.

II

Several days passed by. Grani steadily and swiftly bore his rider over mountains, through valleys, and across rivers with untiring zeal. It was not until they reached the noble river Rhine that Siegfried drew rein. Upon the crest of a hill, across the stream from where they stood, rose a splendid castle. It seemed to belong to the king of the country, for it was very large, and a pennant floated from an upper turret. The current of the river was deep and swift at this point, but a small boat was moored not far from Siegfried.

"Come, Grani!" he said dismounting; "I will take the boat, while you swim beside me across the stream. This promises an adventure!"

Grani obeyed and they were soon in the channel, headed toward the castle.

Now this castle was the seat of a king of an ancient and warlike tribe. His name was Gunther, and he tried to deal fairly with every man. He had a beautiful sister, Gudrun; and, also, a half-brother named Hagen, a sly fellow who was always plotting mischief. Hagen, in fact, was the evil genius of the castle. You will not wonder at this, when I tell you that he was of kin to the Nibelungs, Alberich and Mime.

Like all of dwarf blood, Hagen had a passion for gold, and was also adept at discovering

secrets. He knew of the stolen Rhine-Gold; and he had also learned—perhaps through Alberich—of Siegfried's quest of Brunhilde. Thereupon he began to plot, and he told King Gunther just enough of his plotting to get the monarch's interest aroused.

On this very day when Siegfried had started across the river toward the castle, Hagen had been telling the King that he ought to find a queen. And then he told of the beauty of Brunhilde, and how she slept upon a lofty cliff surrounded by a barrier of fire.

"None but the bravest of heroes can rescue her," Hagen continued. "But there is one who is even now upon this quest. He is called the bravest of the brave, and his name is Siegfried."

Then turning to the Princess Gudrun, he added slyly, "Perchance Siegfried is the hero *you* have been awaiting, O Princess! He is handsome as he is brave."

Now Gunther liked not the idea of another man being braver than he. But he only said, "I should like much to see the fair Brunhilde; but if I could not pierce the flame, how could I persuade Siegfried to do so in my stead, seeing this is his own quest?"

"Leave that to me," laughed Hagen. "I would brew him a drink that would make him

forget all his past—his plans and wishes—and he would love the first lady his eyes fell upon."

He looked again slyly at Gudrun, who blushed red, but wished within her heart that she could see this Siegfried. Her wish was soon to be gratified, for just as Hagen finished speaking they heard the sound of a horn, out on the river, blown in challenge.

"Who dares challenge Gunther in his own castle?" exclaimed the King starting up.

Hagen hurried to the battlements.

"I see a knight clad in glittering gold armor," he said. "He is in a boat alone; and by the boat swims a horse. With your favor I will meet him at the landing." And Hagen seized sword and helmet and hastened out.

King Gunther followed him, his curiosity being aroused by the challenge and Hagen's description. Together in silence they awaited the coming of the boat which made swift progress against the current, driven by Siegfried's muscular arms. Soon it touched the bank, and the young man sprang out. Drawing his sword he saluted the two and then placed himself on guard.

"I am Siegfried," he said simply, " and if any man gainsay my landing on these shores, I am ready to meet him in honorable combat!"

"Not so!" said Gunther, stretching out his hand cordially. "If your name be Siegfried, then am I right glad to welcome you! Much have I heard of your prowess, and more would I fain hear while you rest yourself at my board. I am Gunther."

Siegfried looked him frankly in the eye, then gripped his hand. Hagen also exchanged greetings with him and led Grani away to the stables. Hagen was overjoyed at the turn affairs had taken. With his swift cunning he lost no time in putting his own schemes into play; and before he joined the King and his guest he found time to brew the drink of forgetfulness, about which he had told the King only a few minutes previously.

Returning to the hall, Hagen found the King and his guest breaking bread together and chatting in a friendly way. Gunther with true hospitality had thrown open his home and realm to the hero. Siegfried on his part offered to serve the King with his sword and steed when any need should arise.

"But how did you know of me, or even that I am Siegfried?" he asked bluntly.

"We have already heard great things of your prowess," replied Hagen joining in the talk; "and the magic helmet would betray you, also."

"The magic helmet?" repeated the young man.

"Yes, the cap of darkness you have at your belt. Have you never tried its wonderful properties? By its aid you can assume any shape you choose."

Siegfried had never heard of the helmet's power before. He did not attempt to conceal his surprise, but said nothing.

Just then the beautiful Princess Gudrun entered the room. She bore a golden salver, upon which stood a goblet. She had already beheld the hero secretly, and now willingly brought him the fatal cup of forgetfulness which Hagen had made.

"Welcome to the palace of King Gunther!" she said with downcast eyes. "Will my lord Siegfried drink a refreshing brew?"

Siegfried thanked her courteously and placed the goblet to his lips. But though he bowed to her and the King, the toast which he whispered to himself was, "To the health of my Brunhilde! May her memory never grow dim!"

But alas! no sooner had he swallowed the potion than all his past life was blotted out! He seemed like one awakened from a heavy slumber, for he rubbed his eyes and glanced wildly about him.

"Where am I?" he asked, leaning upon a chair for support. "What has happened?"

Then his glance fell upon Gudrun who stood silent and ashamed of what she had done. As he looked, a flame of love was kindled in his heart for her, by the power of the magic draught.

"Who is this fair creature?" he asked, turning to the King. "Is she your wife?"

"She is my sister," answered Gunther. "I have no wife."

"It is not well for man to live alone; and all the more if he be king."

"That is what my brother Hagen has told me. But the one woman I could wish to win, methinks, is not attainable."

"How so?" asked Siegfried.

"She is hedged about by a barrier of fire."

"A barrier of fire?" said Siegfried, slowly, and rubbing his eyes again. "A barrier of fire?"

"She can only be reached by one who is brave enough to force his way through the flame," continued Gunther; "by one who knows no fear."

"One who knows no fear?" again repeated Siegfried. "I knew such a man once." But he shook his head sadly and gave up trying to think.

"Yes," added the King, " he who knows no fear can alone win Brunhilde for his bride."

Siegfried made no immediate reply. The

potion had done its full work, and he had utterly forgotten Brunhilde. Presently he said,

"I know not the maid of whom you speak. But methinks she could not be as fair as your sweet sister."

Gudrun ran hastily from the room at this.

"I would be willing to go far to win *her* favor," he continued with the frankness of youth.

"Would you be willing to aid King Gunther's wooing?" asked Hagen.

"Right gladly," answered Siegfried. "But how?"

"Your magic helmet would give you his appearance," replied Hagen; "that is, if you would dare face the barrier of fire."

Siegfried's eyes flashed. "*Dare?* I dare anything, if only King Gunther and his fair sister give me their regard!"

The King sprang to his feet quickly.

"Spoken like a man and a brother!" he exclaimed. "Upon my soul, I love you! And if you will obtain Brunhilde for me, I shall undertake to win Gudrun for you."

"Done!" said Siegfried, grasping his hand. "I shall go with you when you wish."

Then the King ordered wine to be poured.

"Come, drink a pledge with me!" he said. "From this day we are brothers. And on the morrow we will set forth."

Together they drank the pledge and vowed vows of eternal friendship.

Meanwhile Brunhilde had grown very lonely. Although she had urged Siegfried to go out into the world and win greater fame, her heart still cried for him, and she wondered, as the days crept by, when he would return. She no longer thought of Walhalla, or the War Maidens. Her whole thought was of Siegfried the fearless.

One day as she sat and brooded, she heard the long-silent cry of the War Maidens, "Hoyo-to-ho!" and looked up in astonishment to see one of her sisters come flying on her steed through the clouds. The next instant the two maidens were sobbing upon each other's necks in the joy of reunion.

"How came you to brave Wotan's displeasure?" exclaimed Brunhilde. "Do you not know that I am cut off from you, and that you incur a great danger in coming thus to me?"

"Wotan no longer cares," answered her sister. "Since his Spear of Authority was broken he sits in Walhalla with moody brow. And, O my sister! that is why I have come to you! I heard him say that if you but gave up the Ring to the Rhine-maidens, of your own accord, the curse would be removed, and the home of the gods saved."

"But I cannot give it up!" exclaimed Brun-

hilde, wildly pressing the Ring to her heart. "It is my betrothal ring from Siegfried, and I have promised to guard it always!"

"That is the only way Walhalla can be saved! Surely you can do that little thing!" her sister entreated.

"What care I for Walhalla?" said Brunhilde, stormily. "I have so long been denied its halls that I have ceased to care. The love of Siegfried is the dearest thing I have in the world. Wotan cannot take that away from me. Go back and tell him so!"

"Then woe must come upon us all!" cried her sister; and seeing further entreaty was useless, she sprang hastily upon her steed and rode away.

Brunhilde made no effort to stay her, but fell again into brooding silence. Presently, however, she heard the sound of a horn and sprang eagerly to her feet. It was Siegfried's horn and he was returning! She rushed to the edge of the rock. The flames which had been burning fiercely parted to right and left, as once before, and the form of a man appeared. It was indeed Siegfried, but she did not recognize him. He had put the magic helmet upon his head and taken the form of Gunther. With Gunther's voice he also spoke to her.

In a tremble she asked, "Who has dared come where only the fearless hero finds a way?"

"I am Gunther the King," he answered, "and have come to claim you as my bride."

"That cannot be," she answered. "I am Siegfried's promised wife."

"Siegfried? You are mad! He is promised to another. Come with me."

"Away! It is not true!" she cried. "This is his Ring, and in its name I tell you to begone!"

She waved it threateningly, but he stepped forward.

"If that is his Ring, I must take it," he said. And before she could avoid him he seized her hand and removed the golden hoop from her finger.

"Come with me!" he commanded. "In the name of this bauble, I tell you to obey."

He had said the words in imitation of her manner, and not at all expecting her to yield so easily, for the power of the Ring also had gone from his memory. But what was his amazement to see her come forward meekly and prepare to go with him. Only as she left the rock, she turned her eyes toward the sky, and moaned,

"Ah, Wotan! I see thy hand in this! Forgive me for having defied thee!"

III

Siegfried could make nothing of this outcry; but delighted that he should succeed in his wooing for Gunther so easily, he led her down the mountain-side and bade her rest a moment by a fountain. She did so, when he went swiftly around a rock and disappeared. The real Gunther who awaited him there now came forward in his stead with horses and bade Brunhilde mount. She sadly obeyed and rode with him toward his castle, while Siegfried dashed swiftly ahead to greet Gudrun and await their coming.

Hagen, meanwhile, had not been idle at the palace. He had seen Alberich and they had plotted together as to the best means to seize the Ring, no matter who should return wearing it. Hagen had also talked with Gudrun and easily persuaded her to accept Siegfried without delay upon his return.

Siegfried, therefore, found a pleasing welcome when he presently arrived; and he had exchanged vows with the Princess before the horns announced that the King was returning with his bride.

Siegfried and Gudrun with Hagen met the royal party at the landing.

"Welcome home, brother!" said Siegfried. "I am overjoyed to see that you have been as successful in your suit as I have been in mine."

Gudrun also kissed her brother. Brunhilde, however, at sight of Siegfried started back.

"Siegfried! You here? Is it true then that you are plighted to another?"

"I am plighted to Gudrun," he answered calmly.

Brunhilde felt a deathly faintness come over her and came near falling to the ground. Siegfried sprang forward and supported her.

"Ah, Siegfried beloved! do you not remember me?" she asked faintly.

The voice stirred strange chords within him, but he did not understand them. He quietly seated her, then turning said, "Gunther, your bride is ill." And as the King approached, he added to her, "You have been faint. See, here comes your husband."

As he pointed to the King, Brunhilde saw the fatal Ring gleaming upon Siegfried's finger.

"Ha! the Ring!" she cried. "Siegfried's Ring! My Ring! Where got you it, if you are not my hero himself?"

"She is excited and overcome by her journey," said Siegfried to the others. Then as if talking to himself he went on, "This Ring? Where did I get it, I wonder? It seems to me that sometime, somewhere— I forget just where —I fought a dragon and wrested the Ring from him."

The three maidens swam close to the shore

Siegfried knitted his brow and strove to recall the past. Hagen stepped quickly forward.

"This excitement is proving too much for both our brides and bridegrooms," he said gaily. "Come, let us within where a feast is spread in honor of the great day."

The King was swift to follow his suggestion.

"Yes, order the trumpets to be blown!" he ordered. "We will rest from our journey and have public feastings."

The party entered the castle, Brunhilde with the rest. She had looked on once again beseechingly at Siegfried, but all his attention was bestowed upon Gudrun. At last the proud spirit of Brunhilde flashed up at what she deemed an insult. She, a daughter of the gods, to be wooed and then forsaken! She vowed revenge upon Siegfried for his rudeness.

However, she gave no sign of all this. She joined the feast, and sat smilingly at Gunther's side. She became his wife, while still her heart cried out for her hero, and cried in no less measure for revenge!

Hagen alone knew of the struggle that was going on in Brunhilde's mind. He watched anxiously her every action; and now that he saw her smile and accept King Gunther before them all, he rubbed his hands in glee, under the

banquet board. He saw that his evil schemes were succeeding just as he had planned.

And so, after the feast was ended, while all was laughter and music within the hall, Hagen came up and talked to Brunhilde. At first it was only idle talk and hidden flattery; then he touched upon Siegfried.

"Speak not to me of him," said Brunhilde coldly.

"Why not?" asked Hagen in feigned surprise. "He is said to be the bravest hero in the world."

"He may be brave, but I care not to talk of him. He is the falsest man alive."

Some rash impulse made her say these words, and she regretted them as soon as spoken. But Hagen was quick to follow them up.

"You amaze and alarm me!" he said. "I had supposed him to be honorable. If he is false he is a menace to our kingdom, and I for one would wish that he were out of it."

"It would indeed be better if he were gone," said Brunhilde, her pride still making her utter rash things.

"I am glad you have advised me of his true character," said Hagen craftily. "The King purposes to give a hunting party to-morrow. Now if Siegfried should not return from it, do you think it would be better so?"

"Yes," said Brunhilde indifferently, and turned to speak to the King.

But if she gave no more thought to these fateful words, Hagen fairly hugged them in his heart. He saw in them a license to do evil to Siegfried.

IV

The next day, as he had said, the King gave a hunting party in honor of the two brides. All were to meet at noonday for a repast in a grove, but were at liberty to follow, that morning, wherever the chase might lead.

Siegfried's horse, Grani, soon outdistanced all the others and led him into a deep wood. There he started a bear but after pursuing it for some time it disappeared, and Siegfried found himself upon a wild part of the banks of the Rhine. Being thirsty and weary he dismounted, drank at the river's brink, and threw himself down upon a mossy knoll.

Just then he heard the sound of singing—a melodious but unearthly strain ending almost in a wail. Looking around, he saw three river nymphs rise out of the water and swim toward him. They were the Rhine-maidens, but Siegfried had never seen them before. However, he was undaunted at the vision, and sought to make a jest at their expense.

"Hail, fair maidens!" he exclaimed. "Some elf has led me astray, so I desire your aid. This elf was in the shape of a bear, and if he was not a friend of yours, I wish you would help me find him."

"What will you give us if we help you?" they asked.

"I have nothing to give until I catch him," replied Siegfried laughing. "What do you desire?"

One of the maidens swam to him with outstretched hand.

"A golden Ring enwraps your finger," she said. "Give us the Ring and we will help you find the bear."

"I think I slew a huge dragon to win this Ring," replied Siegfried lightly. "That would be a sorry trade for me to barter it for a bear."

"You are selfish," the maidens sang teasingly. "Be wise and give us the Ring!"

They dived in and out of the water and Siegfried laughed to watch them, secretly resolving to throw them the Ring before he left them, for it had no present value in his eyes. But soon the three maidens swam close to the shore and lifted up their arms warningly.

"Beware, Siegfried!" they exclaimed. "The Ring has a curse upon it! Better give it to us!"

"A curse?" he asked. "That makes it interesting! I must hear about this curse."

Then the Rhine-maidens sang,

Siegfried! Siegfried! Siegfried!
Sorrow dire we foresee:
If thou wardest the Ring,
A curse it will be.
From the Gold of the Rhine
It was craftily wrought,
Then cursed by the dwarf
When its magic he sought.
Whoever shall own it
Is fated to fall;
The dragon thou slewest
Was but one among all.
To-day *thou* art stricken—
Thy doom we divine—
Unless thou returnest
The Ring to the Rhine!

Siegfried heard the song through, then placed the Ring tightly on his finger.

"Ah, ye are trying to frighten me into giving up the trinket!" he said. "But ye have sung your song to the wrong ears. I know not what fear is, and have been hunting it all my life."

"Beware, Siegfried!" the maidens cried entreatingly, sinking once more into the water's depths.

"Farewell!" he called after them laughingly. "I must hasten to join the hunt."

The sound of a far-away horn was now heard, and he answered it with his bugle, then hastily

mounted Grani and rode away. Thanks to his swift steed he soon reached the spot agreed upon for the noontide repast. He greeted the two ladies, the King, Hagen and the retainers and seated himself between Hagen and Gudrun. Brunhilde sat directly opposite, by the King's side.

As Siegfried had brought no game to the feast, it was jestingly decreed that he should entertain the company by telling some of his past adventures. Hagen passed goblets of wine to each one present, and took the opportunity to pour into Siegfried's cup a few drops of a potion which caused him to remember again some of his past.

So Siegfried began to tell of his early life in the forest with Mime; of how he harnessed the bear to frighten the dwarf; of his Sword of Need and the fight with the dragon.

The company applauded his story and begged him to go on. He gladly did so, for it now seemed new and strange to him also; or as if it had been a dream. Hagen poured more of the potion into his goblet.

"After I slew the dragon," continued Siegfried, "a strange thing happened. I chanced to get a drop of its blood upon my tongue, when I heard a bird singing to me and I understood all it said. It told me of this magic Ring I

The death of Siegfried

have on my finger and of the Rhine-Gold in a cave. It also told me of a maiden on a mountain height surrounded by a barrier of fire. Her name was— Brunhilde!"

He sprang to his feet, rubbed his eyes, and looked across the table.

"Her name was Brunhilde!" he exclaimed again; and then he stretched out his arms.

"Brunhilde, it was *you,* oh, my beloved! Where have you been so long?"

Brunhilde rose hastily as if to reply; but before she could utter a word Siegfried fell backward. Hagen had struck him treacherously from behind with his spear.

"What have you done?" shouted the King, while Gudrun leaned her head swooningly upon her knees.

"I have slain a traitor!" boldly replied Hagen. "Did you not hear him admit that he had sought Brunhilde before he was wed with the Princess Gudrun? And Brunhilde herself ordered his death."

"No, no!" shrieked Brunhilde, rushing to her dying hero's side. "Ah, beloved, I see it all now! The curse of the Ring was upon us and you knew not what you did!"

She lifted his head upon her lap and tried to pour wine down his throat. His eyes, which

were already fast glazing, opened again at the touch of her hand.

"Brunhilde!" he whispered. "Where have you been? I—have—sought you——"

"Siegfried! Siegfried! forgive me! It has all been a cruel mistake! Do not die! Ah, beloved, look at me with your dear eyes again! Your kiss awakened me from a slumber of years. See, I kiss you and love you. Why do you not awaken as I did? Do not go away and leave me again! I shall not let you go!"

She pressed her lips wildly upon his, and the kiss stayed his soul yet a moment more.

"Brunhilde—mother—we will—not—part—"

The hero who knew no fear had ended his brief earth battle.

Brunhilde wept bitterly in the first outburst of grief. Then summoning all her pride and resolution, she rose and confronted Hagen.

"This is your evil deed!" she said. "You shall not fasten thoughtless words of mine upon it. There has been conspiracy here, and I fear that ye all are in it."

"There has indeed been conspiracy," the King answered sadly; " but Hagen alone is the doer of this deed, and for it he shall answer. Our conspiracy lay only in giving Siegfried a drink of forgetfulness. We did not know he had become plighted to you; and he himself

was made to forget it by the potion. He served us in all innocence."

Brunhilde looked at Hagen, Gunther, and Gudrun scornfully; then turned to the retainers.

"Take up the body of Siegfried," she commanded, "and bear it to the river's brink. There we will burn it upon a funeral pyre, and there will I consign this Ring of the curse back to the Rhine-maidens."

They placed Siegfried upon his shield and laid the Sword of Need across his breast. Then they bore him as she had commanded to the bank of the river. By sunset a great funeral pyre had been erected, and the body was laid upon it. A torch was applied, and as the heap burst into flame Brunhilde called her steed Grani and mounted him.

"Hoyo-to-ho!" she cried, giving for the last time the call of the War Maidens. "Siegfried, beloved, I come to thee!"

And straight into the fire she rode, and the flames leaping high hid her and her steed from view. But out of the midst of the pyre her voice called to the Rhine-maidens,

"Behold the Ring; the Ring of the curse! Come, seize it, and may gods and men be relieved of its ban!"

At her cry a wondrous thing was seen by the watchers round about the pyre. A great wave

rose out of the bed of the river, and on its crest the three Rhine-maidens appeared. Up over the bank rushed the wave, quenching the fire as it came and sweeping all before it into the water's depths.

Suddenly Hagen gave a fearful cry. He beheld the Ring again being swept from beyond his grasp, and he plunged into the current and attempted to take it from one of the maidens who held it exultingly aloft. But the other two twined their arms about him and dragged him down with them. When the wave had subsided he was no longer to be seen; nor was there any vestige of the funeral pyre or Brunhilde. The curse of the Ring was wiped away.

Just then a reddish glow was seen in the sky. Swiftly it grew and spread like the light of many auroras. In speechless amazement the onlookers beheld this awe-inspiring sight. The doom of the gods had come with the recovery of the Ring. Walhalla was being destroyed. Wotan's kingdom was at an end. Henceforth the world was to press forward to new and better things.

(End of "The Ring of the Curse.")

The funeral of Siegfried

THE SHARPSHOOTER

I

Kuno, the chief huntsman to the Duke of Bohemia, was growing old. For many years he had held this honored position, but now as his sight grew dim and his hand unsteady, it became necessary for him to step aside in favor of some younger hunter.

Max, a likely young fellow who had been his assistant, was exceedingly anxious to step into his shoes, and Kuno himself was not unwilling. Max was a crack shot, and moreover he was very much in love with Agnes, the pretty daughter of the old forester. If he could only obtain this coveted position of chief huntsman, he could marry Agnes, and the position would still be "in the family."

But in order to win the girl and the place, Max must first prove his prowess in a shooting tournament. It was no easy task, for here the best shots in all Bohemia were to assemble. The double incentive got the better of the young man's nerves, for in a preliminary contest, or as we would say to-day, a "try-out," Max was unsteady and the palm was carried off by Kilian,

a wealthy peasant, who spent a great deal of his spare time shooting at targets.

Poor Max sat down disconsolate. It was too bad to be beaten, and in the presence of his sweetheart, but worse still, Kilian had the bad manners to poke fun at him.

"Thought you could shoot, didn't you?" he jeered. "Well, you will have to practice up a bit to be in my class. I am the King of Marksmen!"

And he strutted about proudly flaunting the blue ribbon on his chest; while the crowd joined in the taunts.

Now Max should have been a "good loser," but he was not. His cup of vexation was filled to overflowing, and springing to his feet he drew his hunting knife and rushed at his grinning, mocking rival. The crowd instantly interposed preventing bloodshed—for which Max himself was thankful enough a moment later, when he cooled off.

"What is this?" demanded Kuno sternly. "You not only disappoint me at the target, but you let your silly temper get the better of you!"

"I am indeed sorry," murmured the crestfallen youth.

"And I"—said Kilian—"am sorry that I provoked you. It is merely a village custom to

taunt the loser, but I guess we carried it too far."

In this fashion the breach was healed.

While they were talking another of the huntsmen, Caspar entered. He was noted as a crack shot, but something about him repelled folks. He had a cynical sort of look, and was given to wandering off by himself. Some said that he was in league with the Evil One.

The old forester now told them a legend of how the first head huntsman had been chosen years before, by the killing of a stag which was bounding through the forest with a man tied to its back. 'Twas said that the huntsman used a magic bullet, but he himself did not believe this tale.

"As for you, Max," Kuno ended, "you must shoot a greal deal better to-morrow than you did to-day, to win either this position or my daughter's hand."

Such a speech was not calculated to steady a young man's nerves, as you must admit. After the others had gone, he sat down at a table and buried his head in his hands. It seemed as if the bottom had dropped out of everything.

Caspar alone had lingered behind, and now touched him on the shoulder.

"Cheer up. All is not yet lost," he said.

"It might as well be over," replied Max de-

spondently. "I know I shall not do any better to-morrow than I have done to-day. Why, I haven't hit anything for a month. I missed a stag, a fair mark, completely the other day. Ill luck has seemed to pursue me."

"I know a way to overcome that," insinuated Max.

"What do you mean?"

"You heard what Kuno said awhile ago about the stag slain by the magic bullet. He does not believe the yarn, but I do. In fact, I have a few magic bullets myself."

"You? Where did you get them? What will they do?" burst forth Max.

"Softly. Some of the others might hear you," cautioned Caspar, looking around.

Then making sure they were not observed, he drew a silver bullet from his pocket, and told Max to load his rifle with it.

"Do you see yon bird?" he indicated.

It was an eagle, flying so high that it seemed a mere speck against the twilight sky.

"Aim at it," he continued.

Max was incredulous, but nevertheless drew a bead on the tiny object, and fired. What was his amazement to see the eagle pitch headlong to the ground.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Oh, if only I

had more of those magic bullets, victory would be mine on the morrow, instead of defeat."

"You can have more," returned Caspar, "if you are willing to pay for them."

"I am willing to pay," said Max eagerly; "only let me have the bullets."

"Anything?" asked Caspar, looking at him with an evil light in his eye.

"Anything!" replied Max. He felt at that moment that he would sell his soul, if only he might win the prize; and that was precisely what Caspar had in mind—a bargain with the Evil One whom he himself served, to exchange the soul of Max for his own.

"Then meet me at the Wolf's Glen at midnight," he said, "and I shall obtain for you seven bullets as potent as the one you made use of just now."

Max could scarcely repress a shudder at the mention of Wolf's Glen, a place of evil repute, but he said, "I will be there," and gave Caspar his hand on it.

II

One other person's heart had been filled with forebodings of the morrow. It was Agnes, the huntsman's daughter, who loved Max quite as deeply as he loved her. They had grown up from childhood together.

After the unsuccessful shooting of this first day she had wandered away into the forest, and there had been confronted by an aged hermit. He looked at her searchingly and then raised his right hand in solemn warning.

"My daughter," he said, "look well to the young man's safety. Evil spirits are hedging him about!"

Then he left her, without further word.

Returning home she sat distraught, as the shadows of evening fell. In vain did her friend Anna, a light-hearted damsel, endeavor to comfort her. As they talked, the report of a gun was heard without. It was Max's shot at the distant eagle. At the same moment a picture became dislodged from the wall. It was that of the first head huntsman, her ancestor who had shot the stag. As the picture fell it struck her a glancing blow on the forehead, drawing blood.

Anna ran to see if she were hurt, and to staunch the wound, which proved slight.

Just then Max entered, with a radiant look upon his face.

"I killed it," he began, then stopped at the sight of the blood. "Are you hurt, dearest?" he asked solicitously.

" 'Tis a mere scratch," Agnes reassured him.

"See, my great-great grandfather Kuno's picture fell, and struck me on the forehead."

"How did that happen?"

"I know not. But I heard the report of a gun outside, and at the same instant down came the picture."

"That was when I struck down the eagle!" muttered Max to himself in an awestruck aside.

He decided, in a flash, not to tell the two girls the true story of that magic shot, although he could not forbear boasting a bit over his prowess. He wanted to reinstate himself in their good opinion as a marksman.

But when he said he had slain an eagle flying at a great height, Agnes was once more filled with fear.

"That was an ill omen!" she exclaimed. "The hermit warned me of evil spirits!"

"Nonsense!" returned Max lightly. "But come," he added presently, "I will not keep you from your slumbers. I have to go to the Wolf's Glen to-night, so must be off."

"The Wolf's Glen!" exclaimed both the girls in a breath.

"Yes, why not? I shot a stag there to-day, and must fetch it in, before the wild beasts get it."

"Oh, do not go there!" implored Agnes, fearing she knew not what.

Anna joined in with her entreaties also; but Max knowing that he had given his word and could not back out, still tried to treat the matter lightly.

"Nonsense!" he said again. "A brave man is not afraid of shadows."

And despite their entreaties he ran laughing from the room.

Howbeit, he was in anything but a laughing mood when he went out into the silent forest to meet Caspar. He knew instinctively that this was no ordinary adventure and that his whole future was at stake.

Stumbling over loose stones and twigs he cautiously made his way to the Wolf's Glen. It was a fearsome place even by daylight, and now half lit by a crescent moon it was eerie indeed. It was a dark chasm surrounded by frowning cliffs, and these in turn topped by gigantic trees. In the background a cascade fell with a hollow sound as though dropping to great depths. On a stump a snowy owl sat blinking with huge golden eyes. In the distance thunder crashed and rumbled. He paused upon the brow of an overhanging rock spellbound.

Caspar was there before him, and had already begun upon his infernal work. He had laid aside his hunting jacket and weapons, and had made a magic circle of black stones twelve feet

in diameter. As he worked he chanted an incantation in monotone:

> Poisoned dew the moon hath shed,
> Spider's web is dyed with red;
> Ere to-morrow's sun hath died,
> Death will wed another bride.
> Ere the moon her course hath run
> Deeds of darkness will be done!

A distant bell sounded the stroke of midnight. The cry of an owl was heard.

Caspar held up on his sword's point a grinning skull, within the eye sockets of which he placed and lighted two tapers. He raised and lowered the skull three times.

"Zamiel, Zamiel, Zamiel!" he called.

It was the name of the Black Huntsman, the Devil himself.

He paused, then repeated the call. Blue smoke began to issue from the depths into which the cascade plunged. Subterranean noises were heard. At last the Black Huntsman himself appeared.

"What is it you desire?" he growled.

"Ah, master," replied Caspar, "thou knowest that my term of life is nearly ended. Three years since, I sold myself to thee."

"Aye," said the fiend, "to-morrow thy soul will be required of thee."

"I have come to make a fresh bargain," said Caspar speaking more boldly than he inwardly

felt. "Grant me a respite of three years more, and I will give thee a fresh victim."

"Whom?"

"He stands before thee"—pointing at the shrinking Max. "He desires seven magic bullets, and will sell his soul for their possession."

The Black Huntsman chuckled—an evil sound which echoed like the far-off rattling of dry bones.

"Then cast thy bullets!" he commanded. "But save the seventh for me."

"Yes," replied Caspar, "and with it thou mays't slay the bride."

"She is no longer in my power," answered the fiend, and in a flash of lightning he vanished.

Within the charmed circle a crucible slowly emerged from the ground, with materials for a fire, and a bullet mould. Caspar fanned his blaze with an eagle's wing—feathers of the fateful bird Max had slain—and amid scenes of terror he moulded one by one the magic bullets.

Max crouched spellbound. He was rooted to the spot. Now he beheld the spirit of his mother. Again it seemed to him that Agnes had shrieked despairingly and plunged over the cliff into the cascade. Then a skeleton stag came bounding through the forest, pursued by a skeleton huntsman. As each bullet came forth shining and deadly some new terror greeted him.

With the seventh and last, the earth trembled, and Zamiel appeared again, and snatched up the crucible leaving the bullets lying on the ground. But Max had fallen over in a dead faint.

III

It was the final day of the tourney, and also Agnes's wedding day. Her father, Kuno, had had some misgivings about letting the ceremony go on, but Max had hastened to him early in the morning, and by the use of one or two of the silver bullets he had made some amazing shots. And when Kuno further heard about the eagle of the night before, he gave his tardy consent, provided Max were successful in that afternoon's trials.

Max by now was supremely confident of his shooting skill, though haunted by an uneasy foreboding. What had the fiend meant by reserving the last bullet for himself?

Agnes, too, could not sweep away a presentiment of fear, although she had nothing but dreams to haunt her.

"I can't shake it off," she told her friend, Anna, who was in her room helping her dress for the wedding; "but I feel sure that something dreadful is going to happen."

"Nonsense!" laughed Anna. "Why do you say that?"

"I had the most awesome dreams all night long. Some of them were connected with the Wolf's Glen, and I can't remember just what they were, but they were horrible. Then I dreamed that I was a dove flying through the air. 'Shoot that dove?' a voice said, indicating me. And Max himself raised his gun and fired. I tried to cry out, to warn him, but too late. I felt a stinging blow and fell to the ground. Then I seemed to recover and saw, weltering in its blood, a monstrous black eagle!"

Agnes shuddered and passed her hand over her eyes. Her friend placed an arm around her and essayed to laugh, but at first it sounded hollow.

"Come!" said Anna, "enough of your dismal croakings!"

Then she told the distraught bride a droll story about how her own aunt had been frightened by a nocturnal visitor, which proved to be a watch-dog.

Agnes smiled a little at this story.

"That is better," approved her friend. "That is the way a bride ought to look. Keep smiling now, there's a dear, for the bridesmaids are on their way here with their flowers. Don't you hear them singing?"

Sure enough, the fresh young voices were heard down the corrider, and soon in they came

with a lovely box of bride's roses. It was being unpacked with many "ohs!" and "ahs!" when suddenly a silence and a little shudder ran around the group. The bride had just drawn from among the flowers—a funeral wreath! At the same moment the portrait of the old huntsman on the wall fell again. Surely it was enough to try the stoutest nerves!

Even Anna started back in alarm at this, but quickly hiding her own fears she laughed again.

"Pshaw, we are silly fools! I am to blame for that picture falling. I hung it up yesterday on a rusty nail. And I can fix these flowers, some stupid practical joker sent."

So saying, with deft fingers she rearranged them into a garland with which she crowned the bride's tresses. Then all the maidens resumed their bridal song, and started for the grove, where the final shooting was to take place, Agnes in their midst.

They found the air tense with excitement. Max had been doing marvellously. The Duke himself, who was present, had commended him, and had told old Kuno that he had picked a likely son-in-law.

One or two other contestants, however, had likewise shot well, and the trials had narrowed down to a final target. Caspar, hiding behind a

tree, was in great glee. He saw himself freed from the curse, and Max eternally damned.

Only one of the magic bullets remained in Max's possession now, and it seemed to burn his hand. It was the Devil's own. Still he must not relinquish it, as by the success of this last shot he would win his bride.

The Duke, glancing through the forest for a difficult mark, saw something white flitting among the trees. It was a dove, like the one that Agnes had dreamed about.

"There is your mark," he said to Max. "Shoot yonder dove!"

Agnes and her bridal party, coming toward them, saw Max raise his rifle.

"Don't shoot!" she cried springing forward; "that is not a dove—it is I!"

Caspar chuckled fiendishly at this; but Max did not hear the cry, so intent was he upon the dove. High it flew among the treetops, but as it reappeared, a flash of smoke and a report told that the deadly bullet was speeding on its way.

At the same moment Agnes uttered a piercing shriek and fell to the ground. Motionless she lay in her wedding finery while a groan went up from the bystanders. In the general commotion none heard the cry which came from the spot where Caspar had been lurking.

"Alas, I have killed her!" lamented Max.

"Not so," said a voice, and the old hermit, whom she had previously encountered in the forest, came forward. "Not so! The wreath of flowers was one that I had blessed. It has turned aside the fiendish bullet, which instead has found its rightful prey."

He raised the white form tenderly, and Agnes opened her eyes. She had only swooned. Then he pointed to the tree behind which Caspar had been hiding, and the attendants rushed thither and dragged forth his dead body. Zamiel, not to be cheated out of a victim, had claimed his own.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the Duke.

Max falling upon his knees confessed the whole thing—how he had been unsuccessful in his trial shots, and Caspar, who was in league with the Black Huntsman, had persuaded him to go to the Wolf's Glen and mould the seven bullets.

"They were the secret of my fine marksmanship," he confessed; "and the seventh and last was the Devil's own. You witnessed the result."

"Wretched man!" exclaimed the Duke horrified, "you stand accursed before God and man. Out of my sight, and let me never see you in my dominions again!"

"Have mercy, my lord!" said a gentle voice, as the bride-to-be fell upon her knees. "What he did was from love for me. Do not banish him forever!"

The hermit also added his plea, saying that Max had already been punished for his sin. And when Kuno joined in the petition, the Duke relented.

"For a year and a day you must remain an exile," he ordered, looking sternly at Max. "At the end of that time you may return to claim your bride. But from this day forward there are to be no more shooting contests to determine the post of chief huntsman. It is too great a temptation to the Evil One."

"Thank you, my lord," said Max humbly. "I deserve your punishment, and thank you for your clemency. But if there were a hundred shooting tourneys, never again would I use the Devil's bullets!"

THE TROUBADOUR

I

THIS is a tale of far-off Spain, and of a gipsy's vengeance. It begins in violence and ends in violence, but the story has been clothed in music so beautiful, by one of the great masters, that it will live for all time. It runs in this wise:

As a band of soldiers sat on guard one evening before the doors of the stately palace of Aliaferia, the ancestral home of the Count di Luna, they kept themselves awake by telling stories. And the one which they liked best was of the tragedy which had long rested upon this fair mansion.

"Tell us again of the gipsy's curse, Ferrando," they begged for the hundredth time; and the grizzled soldier nothing loath began:

"When I was a youngster in the service of the old Count di Luna—God rest his bones!—and he was not so old either, but grief killed him—he had two sons that were the apple of his eye. One was just able to toddle about, and the other was an infant in the cradle, when the Countess, their mother died. You can well believe that the Count watched the two little

fellows with the eyes of a hawk, and when the baby took sick he was almost wild. The nurses sat by the crib night and day.

"For several days the child hovered 'twixt life and death—a turn of the hand, you might say. Then one night the nurse, tired out, closed her eyes for forty winks. She awoke with a start to see a fierce-looking old hag of a gipsy standing over the cradle waving her arms, rolling her eyes, and muttering a jargon. She was casting a spell on the child.

"Well, of course the nurse screamed, and the guard rushed in and grabbed the old hag, and bore her away cursing. The next day they brought her before the Count and gave her a sort of trial. She claimed that she was weaving a good spell over the child, and it would get well. But nobody believed her. I saw her, too, and she was an evil-looking customer. So as the baby still lay in a stupor and looking as if he were dying, they condemned her to death for witchcraft, and said that she should be burned at the stake.

"No sooner said than done. They drove a stake in the open square, hustled the witch down there, piled up faggots around her, and set them afire. Among the crowd that gathered was a young gipsy girl, who was evidently her

daughter. For just before the flames got her, the old witch turned to her and said,

" 'Avenge my death!'

"The young gipsy didn't lose much time about it, as the Count soon discovered. When they returned to the castle there was a great outcry. The baby was missing, and the frantic servants said they had seen the gipsy girl seize it and run back to the same fire that had consumed her mother, and dash it in the flames."

The listeners drew a long breath, then one of them said: "We have heard it was not the Count's child that she burned, but her own baby, by mistake."

"Yes, so say some," replied Ferrando. "Nobody knows whether the boy lives or not. But the Count who seemed to grow old overnight, and who died not long after, always thought that his son still lived. His dying wish to the older boy, the present Count, was to keep up the search for the young gipsy woman in the hope of finding the lad."

"Ill luck will follow the house of Luna until the gipsy is found," said the soldiers to each other in low tones. "She hovers over this roof like a bird of ill omen."

They were roused from this dire tale of the past by the tinkling tones of a guitar which came from a neighboring garden, and they stopped

their idle talk to listen appreciatively to a sweet tenor voice.

"That's the young minstrel again," they said. "The Count had better watch out. He has a dangerous rival."

The Count di Luna, who was now grown to manhood, had fallen deeply in love with the Lady Leonora, who was a lady-in-waiting to the Princess of Arragon. All had gone well with his suit until at a great tournament where many visiting knights tilted their lances, a strange knight had ridden forward, clad all in black, who conquered every opponent who dared to meet him. He was proclaimed victor in the tourney, and had chosen Leonora as his Queen, and she it was who placed the wreath upon his helmet.

None knew who this handsome stranger was, except that he called himself Manrico the Troubadour. He was quite as skilled in music as in war, and often since the tournament had come beneath the balcony of Leonora, to sing his ballads.

The Count was not long in discovering his rival's identity, and stole into the palace gardens to surprise the minstrel. As he watched, what was his rage to see an upper casement window open and Leonora herself appear upon the balcony. She exchanged tender words with her

serenader, and ended by declaring that she loved him with all her heart.

Di Luna sprang forward at this and confronted the minstrel.

"Who are you, upstart!" he cried, "who comes prowling about these grounds like a thief in the night? You shall pay for your presumption!"

"I am Manrico the Troubadour, and I fear no man," retorted the other.

"The Troubadour, forsooth! I have learned your real trade. You are a brigand from the mountains, and a price is set upon your head. But I shall not call the guard. You will fight me."

"As you please," answered the minstrel drawing his sword.

"Ah, do not fight—for my sake!" implored the unhappy Leonora.

But it was for her sake that they fought, so they heeded her not. The swords flashed and crossed. The Count was an expert swordsman, but soon realized that he had met his match. Back and forth they lunged and parried, until a dexterous move on the part of Manrico sent his antagonist's weapon flying through the air. But some strange impulse restrained his hand from striking further. He looked at the Count, then sheathed his own weapon.

"Go!" he said, "I cannot take your life."

And leaving the humiliated Count still raging at the turn of events, he turned on his own heel and sped away among the trees.

II

Manrico had reason for his hurried departure. The Count had learned the truth, that he was a brigand, and he knew his life was no longer safe—especially since he had allowed the Count to live. Now Manrico hastened back to the mountain retreat of the gipsies, where his mother, Azucena, nursed him back to health; for he had been wounded.

One day as he lay resting and nearly recovered he told her of his many adventures, ending with the duel in the palace garden with the Count di Luna.

"Di Luna?" she asked quickly. "Did you say you fought with the Count di Luna?"

"The very same," he answered.

"Then why—oh, why did you spare him?" she mourned. "It was his father who burned my mother at the stake. I have sworn vengeance against his house, and you must help me."

"I know not," he said musingly, "but something bade me stay my hand, after he was disarmed. I could not strike."

"At another time you *must* strike," Azucena

said between set teeth. "He is our sworn enemy. He must not live."

As they talked, the rest of the gipsy band were busied with plans for another foray. The sun was up, and all was activity. The forge fires burned, and the men heated and pounded their weapons into better shape, while the women cooked the morning's meal. Hither and thither ran boys saddling the horses.

And as the swarthy men bent over the glowing iron at the anvils, and beat lustily they sang:

Who cheers the days of the wandering gipsy?

Just then a hail was heard from the woods, followed by the countersign, and in rode one of their number who had been away on a scouting expedition. He told the men, who crowded around him, how the land lay, then turning to Manrico he said:

"And how goes our chieftain? Are you able to ride forth again and bear arms?"

"Yes, if the cause is pressing. What's in the wind?"

"I have heard news of the Lady Leonora."

"And what of her?" asked Manrico, instantly struggling to his feet.

" 'Tis said that she has mourned your departure, and believes that you are no more, and that —rather than endure the Count's attentions—

she has determined to take the veil. She plans to enter a convent this very day. And I have also heard that the Count is determined to prevent it. He is planning to post soldiers at the very gates of the convent, and carry her off."

Manrico had heard enough. He turned to his men.

"I'm off!" he said. "Will you follow me to the rescue?"

"That we will!" they answered with a roar.

Manrico bade the protesting Azucena help him on with his armor. She was afraid he was not yet strong enough, but he waved her entreaties aside.

"What would my life be worth to me, if I lost Leonora?" he cried.

All that day he rode, closely followed by his men, and at nightfall they sighted the walls of the convent. Manrico posted his men in a clump of trees and went forward on foot to reconnoitre. Presently he came to a spot which commanded a view of the road, and had hardly concealed himself when a bell on the convent tower tolled the hour of prayer.

At the signal he could see through the open gate a procession of the sisterhood marching slowly through the garden in the direction of the chapel. One in the midst had a garland of flowers upon her veil. It was Leonora, the new

bride of the Church. She paused a moment and raised her veil to bid a weeping friend farewell.

Manrico groaned inwardly, but before he could take any action, the bushes on the further side of the road parted, and the Count and his men dashed out.

"Now!"cried the Count, "let us seize her!"

"Sacrilege!" screamed the nuns, as the soldiers appeared at the gate.

"To the rescue!" shouted Manrico in his turn, and sprang forward intercepting the Count, who was about to lay hands upon Leonora.

"You?" exclaimed the Count.

"Manrico!" cried Leonora in joyful recognition.

"Yes, 'tis I!" he said, then sternly to the Count—"Look well to yourself, for I may not spare you this time."

"Foolish braggart!" snarled the Count. "Seize him, my men. I will look after the lady."

But help was at hand. The other gipsies now rushed in and quickly overpowered the Count's men. They disarmed them, and Manrico himself took the Count's sword and broke it in two.

"Go!" he said again; "but do not cross my path a third time!"

He turned then to the maiden.

"Will you go with me and be my bride, instead of the bride of heaven?" he asked.

"I will go," she answered, " and I know that heaven will bless our vows."

III

Manrico retreated with Leonora to the Castle of Castellar, and there made ready to defend it against the Count's forces. The latter marched out in strong array and encamped in the valley below. They proposed to starve out the besieged, if they could not tempt them forth to battle.

As reinforcements daily came to his banner the Count smiled grimly. "This time he shall not escape me," he thought. And no feeling of pity stirred his heart, at the remembrance that he himself had been twice spared. He could only vision Leonora, as about to become the bride of another.

Fortune favored his evil designs when, one evening, a gipsy woman was found skulking near the camp and brought into his presence. To all his questions she gave evasive replies. Then the old soldier, Ferrando, looked at her sharply.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"Biscay," she replied sullenly.

"Biscay!" said the Count. "That is where the gipsy fled, who stole my brother."

Azucena, for it was she, started in her turn, and the observant Ferrando pounced upon her.

"I know her," he said. "I thought I recognized her awhile ago, but now I am sure. She is the old hag's daughter, who threw the child into the fire!"

"Let me go!" she screamed. "I did not kill your brother!"

But the Count full of wrath commanded them to bind her. She should be burned at the stake as her mother was.

In her despair Azucena called aloud to Manrico, her son, to save her. On hearing this the Count was doubly glad. So the hated Manrico was her son! He could pay the old score and wreak vengeance upon his rival at one and the same time.

"Bring the wood and pile it up here in sight of the castle walls," he ordered. "We shall give Manrico a chance to witness this execution without stirring forth."

While they made these dire preparations in the Count's camp, all was mirth and festivity within the castle walls. This was the evening of Leonora's wedding to Manrico, and the lovers were blissfully happy. Only at times when she heard the clamor from some part of the battlements would Leonora turn and shudder.

"Banish your fears," Manrico reassured her tenderly. "We shall defeat our foes, and happiness will be ours."

As the time of the marriage ceremony approached, at nightfall, the great hall of the castle was lighted up, and presented a brilliant scene. The retainers gathered together, decked in their finest, and none would suspect that grim war stalked without.

To the strains of the wedding hymn the handsome couple entered the hall. They had scarcely reached its center, however, when one of Manrico's trusted friends rushed forward.

"Look!" he cried, and led the groom to a broad window commanding the valley below.

A woman was being tied to a stake, and the heaped-up faggots proclaimed her sinister fate. He could not see her features until a soldier's flaming torch was thrust close to her face. She looked up in her turn and saw the faces at the castle window.

"Manrico, my son! Save me!" she cried.

"Merciful heaven! It is my mother!" exclaimed Manrico, horror-stricken. "Leonora, I must go to her rescue!"

Kissing his bride-to-be tenderly, he hastily seized his armor, bade his men follow him, and rushed from the room.

A moment later the sounding of trumpets and the dropping of the castle gates proclaimed that the battle was on. The besiegers had been tempted forth, just as the wily Count had hoped.

IV

Once outside the sheltering walls of the castle, Manrico and his men were overcome by superior numbers. Manrico was made prisoner and the triumphant Count lost no time in taking him to his own castle for safe-keeping. Azucena also was reprieved from immediate execution, and taken with him, but not from any motives of mercy. The Count planned a complete and far-reaching revenge.

One triumph, however, was denied him. Leonora managed to escape during the conflict, and had been hidden away so securely that he was not able to find her.

Still further piqued, he brought Manrico and his mother to speedy trial. The troubadour was sentenced to death at the headsman's axe, and Azucena was again condemned to the stake.

On the night before the execution, Leonora made her way stealthily to the walls below her lover's dungeon. In order to let him know that she was near, she began to sing softly. She was interrupted by the dull, booming tones of a bell.

"What is that?" she asked, startled.

"It is the Miserere," answered a companion. "They are tolling for the dead."

"For the dead! Mayhap we are too late!"

But just then the loved voice that she had once heard in the garden beneath her window—oh, how long ago it seemed!—began to sing in answer to her. How sweet it sounded, and yet how hopeless, catching its beat from the measured strains of the Miserere! At the last the voice broke with a sob—

My Leonora, fare thee well!

Manrico was choosing this, his only means, of telling her a last good-bye. He had given up all hope of rescue and was resigned to his fate.

"No!" said the determined girl to herself, "I cannot let him die like this. I will save him, at whatever cost to myself."

At this moment the Count himself approached the spot where she stood. He had not yet seen her, and he was giving orders to his men about the executions on the morrow. Leonora cast herself at his feet, her arms stretched out imploringly.

"You?" he cried. "I thought you were dead."

"Nay—but I shall die unless you give me Manrico's life," she answered.

"Why should I grant this request? He has been the one obstacle between me and thee."

"But he shall be no longer," she pleaded. "If you will spare his life, I will wed with you."

"Do you mean it?" he asked incredulously.

"I swear that I shall be yours, if I live. Only let me enter yonder dungeon, and tell him he is free."

"Ho, there!" shouted the Count, radiant with joy, "admit this lady to Manrico's dungeon. You may tell him he is free, and I shall await your return with all a lover's eagerness."

But poor Leonora had already determined that she would not return. Sooner than wed the Count she was determined to kill herself. She wore a ring which concealed a deadly poison; and on her way to the cell she found opportunity to swallow it.

When the bars were drawn from the prison doors, she saw two forms half reclining in the shadows. Manrico was trying to cheer his mother, by recalling their old, happy life in the Biscay mountains. He was endeavoring to divert her mind from the horrors of the stake, but in her half-waking dreams she could not cast it from her. She recalled her own mother's dreadful death, and in imagination the flames were already creeping toward her.

"But I shall cheat them yet!" she cried. "I am dying, and before to-morrow's sun I shall be no more."

Just then, Manrico looking up beheld a female form in the doorway.

"Do I dream? Is it you, Leonora?" he murmured.

"It is I, and no spirit," she answered, coming and kneeling by them. "See, I have come to bring you your liberty."

"'Tis impossible. The Count would never relent," said Manrico.

"'Tis true. See the doors are open. Fly, before he changes his mind."

"Not without you, beloved," he said, drawing her close to him. "But why do you tremble?"

"Go!" she pleaded, feeling a deathly sickness creeping over her. "I must remain— but go, back to your mountains and freedom. Forget Leonora!"

"Ah, now I see!" he exclaimed bitterly. "You have purchased my liberty at your expense. I will not have it upon such terms!"

He thrust her from him, and as she sank a huddled heap upon the floor, he was touched with instant remorse and raised her again in his arms.

"My Leonora," he said, "I would rather die than have you belong to another."

"My Manrico," she answered faintly, "I would rather die than give you up. But the deed is already done. I have taken poison rather than become the Count's wife. In a few moments I shall be no more. So why do you stay? Fly—while there is—yet time!"

Her words became fainter and fainter. Manrico groaned in despair and clasped her to his heart.

As she breathed her last, Di Luna entered the room. He saw at a glance that death had cheated him of his triumph, and full of rage he determined not to postpone his revenge another moment.

"Away with him to the block!" he shouted, pointing to the unhappy Manrico.

The latter offered no protest. What was there to live for now, since his beloved Leonora was no more? He looked proudly at the Count, then stalked out between the files of soldiers.

A moment more and the dull sound of an axe was heard. It marked the passing of his spirit—gone to join that of Leonora perchance in a happier world.

The sullen blow startled even the Count. It likewise aroused the half-sleeping old gipsy woman, whose moments likewise were drawing to a close.

"What hast thou done, monster?" she cried, seeing the Count standing there, a look of savage triumph on his face.

"The axe has fallen!" he gloated, "And thy son is no more!"

"My son!" she shrieked. "He was not my son, save that I reared him and loved him as my own. Know, thou fiend, that thou hast slain thine own brother!"

TANNHAUSER, THE KNIGHT OF SONG

I

MANY years ago, when the Christian faith had driven out the belief in gods and goddesses, Venus who had been long acclaimed the Goddess of Love, became an evil witch. She went to dwell in a deep cavern within a mountain in Germany which came to be called the Venusberg. Here she would lie in wait for men whom she would enchant and keep imprisoned within the mountain forever. They would forget their homes and loved ones —everything—while they served her and were subject to her wiles. They no longer saw the sun or moon or stars or the fresh green of the springing grass. Instead, they lived in a rose-colored twilight filled with beautiful clouds, the heavy perfume of flowers, and the dancing, laughing figures of youths and maidens—spirits of this mysterious realm ruled over by the lovely witch Venus.

One day while this enchantress was watching and waiting near the entrance to her grotto she saw a knight coming slowly over the mountains. He was young and handsome, with the first fine

strength of early manhood, but just now he seemed moody and dispirited. Venus who could read the hearts of men knew who he was and whence he came, but as you have not yet heard, I will pause to tell you.

The young knight's name was Tannhauser and he lived in the country of Thuringia. At this time there were many minstrels, or strolling singers, in the land, and so popular were they at all the courts that even the knights laid aside their swords and spears and forgot their joustings for the harp and its music and the contests of song. The King of this country, in his castle at Wartburg, had held many song contests or tournaments, and great was the honor to any knight or minstrel who won his prizes.

One of the best harpers and sweetest singers of them all was Tannhauser. He had early shown a fine ear for music, and when the time came for him to enter the contests, he won many prizes and bade fair to outdistance all the others. Indeed, it was whispered that so appealing were his harp chords and so wonderful was his voice, that he had quite won the heart of the King's niece, the Princess Elizabeth.

Yet Tannhauser was not entirely happy. He loved the Princess and he loved his music, but although both smiled upon him he felt vaguely

dissatisfied. It seemed to him as though the honors and pleasures of the world had come with too little effort. He wanted to reach out beyond for other things still unattainable—he knew not what.

Finally he bade farewell to the Princess, and to his friends at the castle, saying that he was going to travel in distant lands. The parting was sorrowful, although he had fully resolved upon it; and now as he set forth across the mountains carrying only his harp he was doubly sad and cast down.

Suddenly the rock door of a cavern swung aside before his gaze as if by magic. In the dimly-lighted entrance he saw a beautiful woman standing and stretching out her arms to him. Her figure was outlined by a halo, as it were, caused by the rosy glow which came from within the cave. It was Venus who sought to lure him. Her terrible witch's eyes were hid behind a smiling face, and she was once again the fairest woman in all the world. Now she wove a spell while she beckoned to him.

"Come," she said softly. "I have seen your unrest and alone can bring you happiness. In my blest land you will find all the music and beauty for which you seek. Come!"

Scarcely knowing what he did, the knight obeyed the enchantress and entered the portal.

As he did so the heavy stone closed behind him and at the same moment the memory of his earth-life vanished like a dream. He had become in a moment a subject of Venus. Taking him by the hand she led him far into the depths of her mysterious realm, and at every step his wonder and delight increased. Here the very trees seemed attuned to harmony. There the waves of a deep blue lake sang of love as they beat upon the shore. Out on the water swam bewitching mermaids; while on the strand the light graceful figures of elves and sirens engaged in mimic warfare.

Here at last Tannhauser thought he had found true beauty and happiness. And so he gladly served his queen for a whole year, thinking of it only as a single day. He had, in fact, completely forgotten his old life and lived wholly in the present, content with the joys of the moment.

But at last a change came over him. Something, he knew not what, stirred within him and told him that he was a slave. He began to realize that he was under the power of a spell and that he had given up many things for which he now dimly longed. He began to grow restless and silent.

The watchful Venus saw this new mood almost before he was aware of it. Anxious to

overcome it, she prepared new and wilder pleasures day by day. Dances, pageants, masquerades, tableaux, banquets and tournaments followed each other in bewildering succession. Concerts were given which far excelled the music of earth. Her wiles seemed successful. For a time, Tannhauser forgot his moodiness; and when Venus asked him to compose a song in her honor, he responded with one full of praise of her beauty and charm. Then he sang of the life at Venusberg and its attractiveness. But even as he sang his new-found longing gained hold of him and he ended with an outburst which surprised even him:

'Tis freedom I must win or die,
For freedom I can all defy.
In rose-hued grottos I am longing
For all the soft wood zephyrs thronging,
For vision of fair heaven's blue,
The songs of birds, the old earth's view!
Come life, come death, forth would I go
To taste of human joy or woe.
No more in slavery would I lie,—
O queen, O goddess, let me fly!

Venus was full of anger at this direct appeal for freedom, in spite of all her arts; but she hid her feelings behind a smile and said in soft tones,

"Whither would you fly? Are not all things here in perfection? What more would you desire? Ask, and you shall be obeyed!"

"I want only freedom," said the knight mournfully.

"What is freedom? Where could you go? The earth you speak of has forgotten you. Here you are immortal and all things are yours."

"Still I would away," persisted Tannhauser. "I know not where. O queen, give me leave to try another life for myself—something that will meet this new-found longing within my breast! I will not be disloyal to your memory. Indeed, I will sing your praise, and yours alone. But give me leave to go!"

"Then depart!" said Venus, her voice growing cold with anger. "Out of my sight, ungrateful mortal! But heed well my warning. You have lost your hold upon the other world by lingering here, and men will shun you when they find whence you come. Some day you will return to me, and willingly. Till then, away!"

She stamped her foot, and in a moment the scene changed like the dissolving picture upon a stage. Instead of the grotto with its perfume and dim lights and dancing figures, Tannhauser found himself lying upon a grassy knoll under the wide blue sky of heaven and with the bright sunlight streaming full upon him. He rose as if waking from a deep sleep,

stretched his limbs and took a long breath of the sweet pure air. As he did so he cast his eyes across the valley and instantly his past life came back to him fresh and distinct as if but yesterday.

There stood the noble castle of Wartburg where he had taken part in the contest of song; where the King had been gracious to him; and where the beautiful Elizabeth had smiled at his coming. A pang smote his heart when he remembered her sweet graciousness. Where was she now; and how long had it been since he proved so unworthy of her?

Near by, a shepherd played upon his pipe while his flock grazed contentedly near him. Presently the piper called the sheep and they followed him down the valley to fresh pastures.

Then the sound of men's voices singing came to the knight's ears from a distant mountain path. Slowly it drew near and grew more distinct—a mournful yet beautiful melody chanted by a group of pilgrims on their way to Rome. As the words of the penitential song reached him, the knight felt for the first time the weight of his sin in turning aside from the path of duty. Overcome with remorse he fell upon his knees before a wayside cross and prayed fervently for forgiveness.

While he knelt a new sound smote the air. It was the blast of hunting horns mingled with the joyous baying of hounds. Presently the King himself entered with a troop of huntsmen starting out upon the chase. As they passed near the kneeling knight the King recognized him, and reining his horse he asked kindly where Tannhauser had been.

"I have been in strange lands, your Majesty," answered the minstrel knight sadly. "I went in search of many things, but I found them not. I pray you, let me fare on my way."

"Not so," answered the King. "We have missed you greatly in the lists of song, and upon the chase. Stay with us at least for a time."

The other knights joined the entreaties of the King. To tell the truth, some were not over anxious for his return, as they remembered only too well how he had vanquished them in singing. But there was one of their number who had been Tannhauser's steadfast friend—Wolfram von Eschenbach by name—who hastened to greet him and urge him to remain with them. Wolfram had been a rival of Tannhauser, not only in song but also for the favor of the Princess. Yet this did not detract from his generous welcome.

But still the wandering minstrel hesitated to return; and it is probable that he would have

gone on his way had not Wolfram said in a low voice,

"Let the welcome of still another win you back to us. There is one yonder in the castle to whom the sight of your face will bring back the light in her eyes and the smile on her lips. In sooth she has drooped sadly since you went away. And the contests of song which she was wont to grace with her presence are now forsaken by her. Need I tell her name to you? Have you indeed forgotten the fairest among maidens, the Princess Elizabeth?"

Tannhauser trembled violently at the mention of her name. A deep longing came over him to behold her face once more and hear the sound of her voice, although he felt with tenfold anguish the sense of his own unworthiness. His eyes were full of tears as he turned and looked toward the castle shining in the sunlight upon the farther hill.

"I pray you lead me to her presence," he said simply.

"Come!" commanded the King seeing Wolfram take Tannhauser by the hand. And turning with all his cavalcade he escorted the wanderer back to the castle with all the pomp of a conqueror.

II

That very night had been set apart for one of the yearly contests of song; and though the lists had long been closed, the King gave command that Tannhauser's name should be added. The Princess Elizabeth had not been visible when the company first returned to the castle. But she had heard of her knight's return, and had joyfully promised to attend the contest; so the occasion bade fair to be of more than usual splendor.

In the evening, before the expected guests were assembled, the Princess went to the Minstrel's Hall—a large circular chamber with high columns and arched roof—to attend personally to setting it in order, and also perchance, as her heart confessed, to catch an early glimpse of her beloved knight.

Fair was the Princess as a May morning, with deep blue eyes that had caught some of the far-off sky in them. Her hair was soft and golden and curly as that of a little child. Slight of frame was she, but with a gracefulness and height that gave her a queenly dignity. Her cheeks, too often pale of late, were to-day flushed with animation. She had indeed missed her minstrel sadly, and now her heart bounded at the news of his return.

He saw a beautiful woman

Presently she heard a familiar footfall in the room, and knew without looking up that it was he.

"O Princess, forgive!" said a voice. Tannhauser was kneeling at her feet, his hands stretched out imploringly.

"You must not kneel to me," she answered, gently endeavoring to raise him. "It is not for me to forgive. Only tell me where you have been so long."

"I cannot tell you that," he replied brokenly. "I have wandered far away from your dear presence; and between yesterday and to-day the veil of oblivion is dropped. Every remembrance has forever vanished save one thing only rising from the darkness,—the thought that some day I might behold your face again and hear you say, 'I forgive.'"

Elizabeth covered her face with her hands, but the glad tears trickled between her fingers; and Tannhauser, beholding her emotion, realized how deeply he had been loved and what a pearl he had cast away.

But the Princess like all loving women was forgiving. She asked no more questions of the minstrel, but when he took one of her hands and then the other, as all lovers will, she let them linger in his own in perfect content.

The entrance of the King broke upon their little scene of reconciliation. He saw it all at a glance and came forward with a frank smile.

"Ah, it is as I had hoped!" he said, as he took a hand of each and held it for a moment. "Now let us have no more quarrels, but live together as harmoniously as one of our minstrel's songs."

Thus it was that Tannhauser realized, in a great wave of thankfulness, that his old life was still open to him, and not closed as Venus had said. He resolved to be worthy henceforth of his position and honors. Above all would be cherish this sweet Princess who loved him so unselfishly.

Not long after this, the sound of trumpets proclaimed that the contest was about to begin. The King and the Princess took their places upon a dais at one side of the hall, while Tannhauser retired to make his proper entry with the other minstrel knights.

Soon the people began to throng the hall. Nobles and ladies came first and passed before the throne and bowed before taking their seats. Then came warriors and chosen guests. And finally with another flourish of the trumpets entered the singers of the evening. Each was a famous knight who, like Tannhauser, had laid aside the sword in favor of the gentler harp. The fame of some of these knights, like Wolfram

von Eschenbach and Walter von der Vogelweide, is known to this day. But among them all none was more handsome or of better renown than Tannhauser.

As these knights did obeisance and took the places assigned to them, the King arose and thanked them all for their attendance. The subject of the songs, he said, was to be "Love"; and whoso should sing best on this lofty theme should receive the prize from the hand of the Princess Elizabeth. Let him ask what he would, added the generous King, and it should be granted.

More than one of the knights had been a suitor for the Princess' hand, and they saw in this promise a reward for their dearest hopes. So you may imagine what a wave of suppressed excitement went around all the crowded hall at this announcement. The hands of the minstrels trembled as they drew lots for the order of their songs.

The lot of Wolfram came first, and amid a profound hush he rose to begin.

Thrumming the harp strings with a practiced hand he began in a low clear voice to sing of unselfish devotion and chivalry. Wolfram had long loved the Princess, but had generously yielded place in favor of his friend Tannhauser. Now his song showed the nobility of the man. He

paid tribute to the ladies of the court among whom the Princess shone as some rare gem. Then, his voice rising steadily higher till it thrilled his hearers, he sang of the one true love that counted its highest joy the sacrifice of even life itself for the loved one.

When Wolfram had finished, the hall resounded with cries of acclamation; for indeed his song had been beautiful, and no less true. Tannhauser alone did not join in the applause. While the song was being sung he had sat silent as one in a dream. Again before his eyes came the vision of the fairy grotto with its gorgeous pictures and entrancing music. He seemed to see the bewitching figure of Venus and to hear his own voice as he promised her, "I will sing your praise and yours alone."

Scarcely knowing what he did, Tannhauser sprang to his feet, before the applause for his rival had subsided, and began to sing an answer to Wolfram's strain. But how different was his theme! Instead of the pure exalted love which glorified in self-sacrifice, he sang of selfish desire which sought only for personal gratification. Truly the enchantment was still upon him, for he could think only of the life of the grotto and the round of pleasures which had been planned for him, rather than of any devotion upon his own part. But that was the way in which Venus,

once the goddess of true love, now weakened men's minds.

When Tannhauser began to sing, the audience gave him close heed. He had not proceeded far, however, with his strange theme, when murmurs of anger and dissent began to be heard which increased until one of the minstrels at length sprang to his feet.

"The love you sing is false!" he cried; "false as your own heart! We will not hear it in silence, nor suffer you thus to cast a slur upon all true knights. I challenge you to mortal combat!"

These words were loudly cheered by other minstrels. The entire hall was in an uproar until the King arose and commanded silence. Then Wolfram was seen standing once more with harp in hand, beckoning to be heard.

In words of kindly reproach he rebuked Tannhauser for his selfish and unworthy song. He could not know what real devotion was, Wolfram said, if he placed it upon so low a plane. Then Wolfram again touched his harp strings and sang a pleasing tender refrain in praise of the love to which they all aspired.

But Tannhauser rudely interrupted him, and heeding not the clamor which broke forth again, he sang in wild reckless fashion of the life he had led during the past year. He told of the grotto,

its music, its perfumes, its exquisite scenes and round of delights presided over by Venus herself.

"Your heroic self-sacrifice," he ended sneeringly, "is cold and tame in comparison with this! And the fairest of women of earth pale into insignificance beside this wonderful goddess. Ah, Venus! I have kept my promise! *Thine* be the praise!"

He ended as one in a trance—as in truth the poor knight must have been. He stood motionless with gaze fixed as it were upon some hidden scene, while his harp fell clattering from his hand to the ground.

Then the outcry burst forth with redoubled fury. The minstrels surged forward tumultuously crying,

"He has been to the Venusberg! He has fallen under the power of the evil one! Away with him! Kill him!"

In their anger and horror of him they must have slain him, had not some one interposed. But quick as thought a slender, white-robed figure stood between them and the misguided knight, and held out her hands entreatingly. It was Elizabeth. She had sat there sick at heart listening to her chosen minstrel's song. All too well she saw how unworthy was the one to whom she had given her heart; but once

given she could not recall it in a moment. She would pray for him and live in the hope that he might yet prove worthy.

"Stop!" she cried to the nobles who circled about Tannhauser, with swords drawn. "Stop, I command you! Would you slay him with all his sins ripe upon his head?"

"He has dishonored knighthood!" muttered the minstrel who had previously challenged him. "He deserves no mercy."

"Then that is all the more reason why you should grant mercy," she answered.

By this time the King had asserted his authority, and soon the semblance of peace was restored. Then Elizabeth in all her sweet dignity pleaded the cause of Tannhauser. Addressing now the King, now the nobles, and now the knight himself, she pointed out that Tannhauser was still under the spell of evil into which he had fallen and was not accountable for his deeds.

"Give him another opportunity, O my King!" she concluded. "Perchance in the doing of some penance or some gracious act, his better heart will assert itself, and he will then see how he has wounded all our hearts this day."

As she finished speaking she turned, to find at her feet the penitent knight. The vision had passed leaving him bowed down under the burden of his sin and unworthiness. He kissed the

hem of her garment while tears flowed fast and unchecked from his eyes. For his life he cared not a straw. But that he should have sunk so low in the eyes of this noble woman—the thought smote his heart with keenest anguish!

Then the voice of the King came to him, as it were an echo,—

"One path alone can save you from perdition and everlasting woe, abandoned man! That path is now open to your steps. To-day a band of pilgrims are setting forth on their toilsome way to Rome. Depart with them and seek pardon for your sins."

Even as the King spoke, a chant was heard through the open portal. Tannhauser recognized it as the same sweet strain he had heard that morning by the wayside cross. He kissed the hem of Elizabeth's robe once again and dared to look with mute entreaty into her eyes. Then he sprang quickly to his feet and addressed the King in two wild, hopeful words.

"To Rome!" he cried, and hurried from the hall to join the pilgrim band.

III

One year passed slowly by. Again it was spring-time, fragrant with the bursting of buds and melodious with the song of nesting birds. And now the return of the pilgrims was anx-

iously expected at Wartburg. But among them all, no heart was more anxious than Elizabeth's. Day after day she had sat in the casement overlooking the valley. Night after night she had knelt in fervent prayer for the safety of one who was a wanderer over the face of the earth. And daily would she go, attended by her maids, to the little wayside cross where Tannhauser had knelt when the pilgrims passed by. Indeed, her whole life seemed to hang upon the love which she had given and could not recall. Her prayer was only that her loved one might be forgiven, and that she might see his face again before she died.

One afternoon just at sunset while she knelt, as her custom was, before the cross, Wolfram von Eschenbach approached her. His love was still as noble and unselfish as it had been in former days, and so he longed almost as earnestly as she for the return of her pilgrim, forgiven. That she might be happy and restored to health was his great desire. To-day the sight of her pale and wasted features alarmed him.

"Health to you, my Princess!" he said saluting her, and then continued, "Methinks it is now about the time of year when our pilgrim band should return."

"Hast heard any news?" she asked starting up.

"None. But the hermit Peter is of opinion

that they will be back before another change of the moon."

"Ah, God grant that they may!" the Princess said, wearily sinking again before the cross.

While Wolfram stood gazing sadly at her dear face, she suddenly turned her head, and a look of rapt attention came into her eyes.

"Listen!" he exclaimed softly while she sprang again to her feet. "Listen! do you not hear it? It is *their* song!"

It was indeed the far-off chant of the pilgrims which her quick ear had caught. They were returning at last!

Soon the little company came in sight, and then filed slowly by, rejoicing that their penance had been accepted and their sins forgiven. But to the eager eyes of the two onlookers one figure did not appear. Tannhauser was not among them.

"He will never return!" said Elizabeth quietly; and giving one last despairing glance down the valley she fell upon her knees and made a last pitiful little prayer. It was that death might soon come to ease her aching heart. Until then she vowed devoted service to the Church, and she asked in return that Tannhauser might still be forgiven.

The prayer ended, Elizabeth rose and slowly walked away toward the castle. Wolfram

Wolfram looked after her

looked after her, as long as she was in sight, with a strange foreboding clutching at his heart-strings,—it was that he would never see her again alive.

The sun had long since sunk, and the twilight was deepening, but Wolfram still lingered by the little cross made sacred by her presence. As he tarried, the evening star rose above the rim of hills and began to glow with peaceful brilliancy. It seemed to Wolfram as though the soul of Elizabeth were there, shining in that far-off sky. He began to sing a beautiful measure filled with this thought and beginning,

O thou sublime, sweet evening star!

Scarcely were the last notes silent when a pilgrim drew near. He was tattered, footsore and dejected, yet at the first glance Wolfram knew him.

"Tannhauser!" he exclaimed. "What does this mean? Do not tell me that you have not received pardon, for the King would not allow you to return otherwise."

Tannhauser did not reply to his questions, but merely said,

"Show me the road to the Venusberg. I have lost my way."

"You have indeed lost your way, unhappy man, if you would return to that evil place!"

exclaimed his friend. "But first tell me, have you been to Rome?"

"I have been to Rome."

"Were not your sins forgiven?"

"You see how I return," answered Tannhauser defiantly.

"I pray you, for old friendship's sake, tell me all!" pleaded Wolfram. "Did you not do penance, and then go before the Pope?"

"Aye, so I did! Every pain and penance set forth in the calendar I did faithfully perform. I afflicted my body with grievous blows. I gave all my substance to the poor. I ministered to the sick. I prayed night and morning before every shrine. I asked forgiveness continually, yet my soul felt heavy and oppressed. Then I went before the Holy Father and confessed all my sin. He had pardoned the other members of our band; but when he heard that I had lived a year in the Venusberg he was filled with horror and indignation.

"'Out of my sight!' he exclaimed. 'There is no mercy for such as you! As soon would I expect this staff in my hand to bud and bring forth green leaves.'

"Thus am I for all time accursed," continued the wanderer bitterly. "There is but one thing left for me to do. The enchantress told me that all men would renounce me and that when I was

driven from the world I could find refuge again in her grotto. I must turn to her."

"Ah, do not go!" said Wolfram, laying a detaining hand upon his friend's shoulder. "Do not throw your last slender chance of salvation away; but live a life of good deeds and self-sacrifice! There was one who knelt at this cross only this evening and prayed to heaven for your pardon. Such prayers do not go unheeded!"

"Too late!" groaned Tannhauser. "I am utterly unworthy and cast off! If you will not direct my steps to the Venusberg, I must summon the goddess herself to my aid."

And raising his voice he called aloud to Venus, under the name of goddess, and asked her to aid his distress.

Instantly the shades of evening were lighted by a ruddy glow, while a heavy fragrance smote the senses. In a radiant mist dim figures were seen which danced forward laughingly and beckoned and pointed. And down the bright broad pathway they trod, a flood of rose-colored light streamed from a portal in the side of the hill, while there in the entrance stood Venus, a vision of evil beauty and charm.

"Farewell, forever!" cried Tannhauser to his friend. "I go to the only haven left for me."

"No, no!" exclaimed Wolfram; "an angel is even now pleading your cause in heaven. It is the soul of Elizabeth! See!"

He pointed as he spoke to a procession of woe that was filing out of the castle gate. It was a group of mourners bearing torches and chanting a solemn refrain. As it drew near a bier was discerned in the midst, and thereon lay the lifeless form of the Princess.

"Elizabeth! Ah, dear Lord have pity!" said Tannhauser in hushed tones while he watched the procession advance. "Have pity and save me from the power of the Evil One!"

As he uttered this heartfelt prayer the magic light of the Venusberg vanished as suddenly as it had come. The enchantress realized that her victim was lost to her forever.

But Tannhauser paid no heed to these things. He stood only gazing at the mournful procession which was passing by. At a gesture from Wolfram it halted; and then Tannhauser came with slow, reverent steps to the side of the bier. As he sank upon his knees his strength suddenly left him and he felt as though his hold upon life were slipping away. But with it went his burden of sin and sorrow, leaving behind a blessed peace such as he had never known before.

"Elizabeth—dear saint in heaven—pray for me!" he murmured.

His head sank down until his forehead touched her hand.

Suddenly the intense stillness was broken by a thrilling cry from the outer edge of the circle.

"A miracle! a miracle!" said a voice.

Wolfram pushed his way gently to his friend's side. In his hand was the Pope's staff—and it had budded and brought forth green leaves!

"See the sign which God hath sent!" he said in hushed tones. "It is a token that all your sins are forgiven."

Tannhauser's face brightened into a glorious smile, but he uttered no sound. Instead, his head fell forward again until it was pillowed by Elizabeth's white arm. The way-worn pilgrim had ended his journey. The Knight of Song had heard the harmony of true love sung by a celestial choir. His wandering steps had been guided by the faith of one steadfast soul into the ways of peace.